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THE COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO

THE

COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

WITH NEARLY FIVE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS FROM DESIGNS BY G. STAAL,
J. A. BEAUCE, AND OTHER EMINENT FRENCH ARTISTS

IN FIVE VOLUMES

VOL. III

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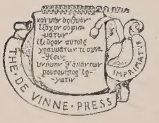

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ESTABLISHING THE PRESENCE OF THE POISON.

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"ARE YOU NOT MY MASTER?"

THE COUNT OF MONTE-CRISTO

CHAPTER XLVIII

IDEOLOGY

IF the Count of Monte-Cristo had lived for a very long time in Parisian society, he would have fully appreciated the value of the step which M. de Villefort had taken. Standing well at court, whether the king regnant was of the elder or younger branch, whether the government was doctrinaire, liberal or conservative; esteemed clever by all, just as we generally esteem those clever who have never experienced a political check; hated by many, but warmly protected by others, without being really liked by anybody, M. de Villefort held a high position in the magistracy, and maintained his eminence like a Harley or a Molé.

His drawing-room, regenerated by a young wife and a daughter by his first marriage, scarcely eighteen, was still one of those well-regulated Paris salons where the worship of traditional customs and the observance of rigid etiquette were carefully maintained.

A freezing politeness, a strict fidelity to government principles, a profound contempt for theories and theorists, a deep-seated hatred of ideology,— these were the elements of private and public life displayed by M. de Villefort.

M. de Villefort was not only a magistrate, he was almost a diplomatist. His relations with the ancient court, of which he always spoke with dignity and respect, made him respected by the new one, and he knew so many things, that not only was he always carefully considered, but sometimes consulted. Perhaps this would not have been so had it been possible to get rid of M. de Villefort; but, like the feudal barons who rebelled against their sovereign, he dwelt in an impregnable fortress. This fortress was his post as *procureur du roi*, all the advantages of which he worked out marvellously, and which he would not have resigned, but to be made deputy, and thus have converted neutrality into opposition.

Ordinarily M. de Villefort made and returned very few visits. His wife visited for him, and this was the received thing in the world, where they assigned to the heavy and multifarious occupations of the magistrate what was really only a calculation of pride, a quintessence of aristocracy — in fact, the application of the axiom, "*Pretend to think well of yourself, and the world will think well of you*," an axiom a hundred times more useful in our society than that of the Greeks, "Know thyself," a knowledge for which, in our days, we have substituted the less difficult and more advantageous science of *knowing others*.

For his friends M. de Villefort was a powerful protector; for his enemies he was a silent but bitter enemy; for those who were neither the one nor the other, he was a statue of the law made man. Haughty air, immovable countenance, look steady and impenetrable, or else insultingly piercing and inquiring, such was the man for whom four revolutions, skillfully piled one on the other, had first constructed and afterward cemented the pedestal on which his fortune was elevated.

M. de Villefort had the reputation of being the least curious and the least commonplace man in France. He gave a ball every year, at which he appeared for a quarter of an hour only,— that is to say, five-and-forty minutes less than the king is visible at his balls. He was never seen at the theaters, at concerts, or in any place of public resort. Occasionally, but seldom, he played at whist, and then care was taken to select partners worthy of him — sometimes they were ambassadors, sometimes archbishops, or sometimes a prince, or a president, or some dowager duchess.

Such was the man whose carriage had just now stopped before the Count of Monte-Cristo's door. The valet-de-chambre announced M. de Villefort at the moment when the count, leaning over a large table, was tracing on a map the route from St. Petersburg to China.

The *procureur du roi* entered with the same grave and measured step he would have employed in entering a court of justice. He was the same man, or rather the completion of the same man, whom we have heretofore seen as *substitut* at Marseilles. Nature, following up its principles, had changed nothing for him in the course he had chalked out for himself. From slender he had become meager; from pale, yellow; his deep-set eyes were now hollow, and gold spectacles, as they shielded his eyes, seemed to make a portion of his face. All his costume was black, with the exception of his white cravat, and this funeral appearance was only broken in upon by the slight line of red ribbon which passed almost imperceptibly through his button-hole, and which appeared like a streak of blood traced with a pencil.

Madame de Villefort.

Although master of himself, Monte-Cristo scrutinized with irrepressible curiosity the magistrate, whose salute he returned, and who, distrustful by habit, and especially incredulous as to social marvels, was much more disposed to see in the noble stranger, as Monte-Cristo was already called, a *chevalier d'industrie*, who had come to try new ground, or some malefactor who had broken his prescribed limits, than a prince of the Holy See, or a sultan of the Arabian Nights.

"Sir," said Villefort, in the tone assumed by magistrates in their oratorical periods, and of which they cannot, or will not, divest themselves in society, "Sir, the signal service which you yesterday rendered to my wife and son has made it a duty in me to offer you my thanks. Allow me, therefore, to discharge this duty, and to express to you all my gratitude."

And as he said this, the "eye severe" of the magistrate had lost nothing of its habitual arrogance.

These words he articulated in the voice of a *procureur-général*, with the rigid inflexibility of neck and shoulders which caused his flatterers to say (as we have said before) that he was the living statue of the law.

"Monsieur," replied the count, with a chilling air, "I am very happy to have been the means of preserving a son to his mother, for they say that the sentiment of maternity is the most holy of all; and the good fortune which occurred to me, monsieur, might have enabled you to dispense with a duty which, in its discharge, confers an undoubtedly great honor; for I am aware that M. de Villefort is not lavish of the favor he bestows on me, but which, however estimable, is unequal to the satisfaction which I internally experience."

Villefort, astonished at this reply, which he by no means expected, started like the soldier who feels the blow leveled at him over the armor he wears, and a curl of his disdainful lip indicated that from that moment he noted in the tablets of his brain that the Count of Monte-Cristo was by no means a very civil gentleman.

He glanced around in order to seize on something on which the conversation might be renewed. He saw the map which Monte-Cristo had been examining when he entered, and said:

"You seem geographically engaged, sir. It is a rich study for you, who, as I learn, have seen as many lands as are delineated on this map."

"Yes, sir," replied the count; "I have sought to make on the human race, taken as a mass, what you practice every day on individuals — a physiological study. I have believed it was much easier to descend from the whole to a part, than to ascend from a part to the whole. It is an algebraic axiom which makes us proceed from a known to an unknown quantity, and not from an unknown to a known; but sit down, sir, I beg of you."

Monte-Cristo pointed to a chair, which the *procureur du roi* was obliged to take the trouble to move forward himself, whilst the count merely fell back into his own, on which he had been kneeling when Villefort entered. Thus the count was half-way turned toward his visitor, having his back toward the window, his elbow resting on the geographical chart which afforded the subject of conversation for the moment,—a conversation which assumed, as had done those with Danglars and Morcerf, a turn analogous to the persons, if not to the situation.

"Ah, you philosophize," replied Villefort, after a moment's silence, during which, like a wrestler who encounters a powerful opponent, he took breath. "Well, sir, really, if, like you, I had nothing else to do, I should seek a more amusing occupation."

"Why, in truth, sir," was Monte-Cristo's reply, "man is but an ugly caterpillar for him who studies him through a solar microscope; but you said, I think, that I had nothing else to do. Now, really, let me ask, sir, have you?—do you believe you have anything to do? or, to speak in plain terms, do you really think that what you do deserves being called anything?"

Villefort's astonishment redoubled at this second thrust so forcibly made by his strange adversary. It was a long time since the magistrate had heard a paradox so strong, or, rather, to say the truth more exactly, it was the first time he had ever heard of it. The *procureur du roi* exerted himself to reply.

"Sir," he responded, "you are a stranger, and I believe you say yourself that a portion of your life has been spent in Oriental countries; thus, then, you are not aware how human justice, so expeditious in barbarous countries, takes with us a prudent and well-studied course."

"Oh, yes—yes, I do, sir, it is the *pede claudo* of the ancients. I know all that, for it is with the justice of all countries especially that I have occupied myself—it is with the criminal procedure of all nations that I have compared natural justice, and I must say, sir, that it is the law of primitive nations, that is, the law of retaliation, that I have most frequently found to be according to the law of God."

"If this law were adopted, sir," said the *procureur du roi*, "it would greatly simplify our legal codes, and in that case the magistrates would not, as you have just observed, have much to do."

"It may, perhaps, come to this in time," observed Monte-Cristo, "you know that human inventions march from the complex to the simple, and simplicity is always perfection."

"In the mean while," continued the magistrate, "our codes are in full force with all their contradictory enactments derived from Gallic customs, Roman laws, and Frank usages; the knowledge of all which, you will agree, is not to be acquired without lengthened labor, and it requires a tedious study to acquire this knowledge, and when that is acquired a strong power of brain is necessary in order to retain it."

"I agree with you entirely, sir; but all that even you know with respect to the French code, I know, not only in reference to that code, but as regards the codes of all nations,—the English, Turkish, Japanese, Hindoo laws, are as familiar to me as the French laws; and thus I was right when I said to you that relatively (you know that everything is relative, sir)—that relatively to what I have done, you have very little to do; but that relatively to all I have learned, you have a great deal to learn."

"But with what motive have you learned all this?" inquired Villefort, astonished. Monte-Cristo smiled.

"Really, sir," he observed, "I see that in spite of the reputation which you have acquired as a superior man, you contemplate everything in the material and vulgar view of society, beginning with man and ending with man,—that is to say, in the most restricted, most narrow view which it is possible for human understanding to embrace."

"Pray, sir, explain yourself," said Villefort, more and more astonished; "I really do—not—understand you—perfectly."

"I say, sir, that with the eyes fixed on the social organization of nations, you see only the springs of the machine, and lose sight of the sublime workman who makes them act; I say that you do not recognize before you and around you any but those placemen whose brevets have been signed by the minister or the king; and that the men whom God has put above those titulars, ministers, and kings, by giving them a mission to follow out, instead of a post to fill—I say that they escape your narrow, limited ken. It is thus that human weakness fails from its debilitated and imperfect organs. Tobias took the angel who restored him to light for an ordinary young man. The nations took Attila, who was doomed to destroy them, for a conqueror merely similar to other conquerors, and it was necessary for both to reveal their missions, that they might be known and acknowledged. One was compelled to say, 'I am the angel of the Lord'; and the other, 'I am the hammer of God,' in order that the Divine essence in both might be revealed."

"Then," said Villefort, more and more amazed, and really supposing he was speaking to a mystic or a madman, "you consider yourself as one of those extraordinary beings whom you have mentioned?"

"And why not?" said Monte-Cristo coldly.

"Your pardon, sir," replied Villefort, quite astounded, "but you will excuse me if, when I presented myself to you, I was unaware that I should meet with a person whose knowledge and understanding so far surpass the usual knowledge and understanding of men. It is not usual with us, corrupted wretches of civilization, to find gentlemen like yourself, possessors, as you are, of immense fortune,— at least, so it is said,— and I beg you to observe that I do not inquire, but merely repeat; — it is not usual, I say, for such privileged and wealthy beings to waste their time in speculations on the state of society, in philosophical reveries, intended at best to console those whom fate has disinherited from the goods of this world."

"Really, sir," retorted the count, "have you attained the eminent situation in which you are, without having admitted, or even without having met with exceptions? and do you never use your eyes, which must have acquired so much *finesse* and certainty, to divine, at a glance, the kind of man who has come before you? Should not a magistrate be not merely the best administrator of the law, but the most crafty expounder of the chicanery of his profession, a steel probe to search hearts, a touchstone to try the gold which in each soul is mingled with more or less of alloy?"

"Sir," said Villefort, "upon my word, you overcome me. I really never heard a person speak as you do."

"Because you remain eternally encircled in a round of general conditions, and have never dared to raise your wing into those upper spheres which God has peopled with invisible or marked beings."

"And you allow, then, sir, that spheres exist, and that these marked and invisible beings mingle amongst us?"

"Why should they not? Can you see the air you breathe, and yet without which you could not for a moment exist?"

"Then we do see those beings to whom you allude?"

"Yes, we do; you see them whenever God pleases to allow them to assume a material form. You touch them, come in contact with them, speak to them, and they reply to you."

"Ah!" said Villefort, smiling, "I confess I should like to be warned when one of these beings is in contact with me."

"You have been served as you desire, monsieur, for you have been warned just now, and I now again warn you."

"Then you yourself are one of these marked beings?"

"Yes, monsieur, I believe so; for until now, no man has found himself in a position similar to mine. The dominions of kings are limited either by mountains or rivers, or a change of manners, or an alteration of language. My kingdom is bounded only by the world, for I am neither an Italian, nor a Frenchman, nor a Hindoo, nor an American, nor a Spaniard,— I am a cosmopolite. No country can say it saw my birth. God alone knows what country will see me die. I adopt all customs, speak all languages. You believe me to be a Frenchman, for I speak French with the same facility and purity as yourself. Well, Ali, my Nubian, believes me to be an Arab; Bertuccio, my steward, takes me for a Roman; Haydée, my slave, thinks me a Greek. You may, therefore, comprehend, that being of no country, asking no protection from any government, acknowledging no man as my brother, not one of the scruples that arrest the powerful, or the obstacles which paralyze the weak, paralyze or arrest me. I have only two adversaries — I will not say two conquerors, for with perseverance I subdue even them, though they are time and distance. There is a third, and the most terrible — that is my condition as a mortal being. This alone can stop me in my onward career, and before I have attained the goal at which I aim, for all the rest I have calculated. What men call the chances of fate — namely, ruin, change, circumstances — I have anticipated them all; and if any of these should overtake me, yet they will not overwhelm me. Unless I die, I shall always be what I am, and therefore, it is that I utter the things you have never heard, even from the mouths of kings — for kings have need, and other persons have fear of you. For who is there who does not say to himself, in society as incongruously organized as ours, 'Perhaps some day I shall have to do with the *procureur du roi?*'"

"But can you not say that too, sir? For the moment you become an inhabitant of France, you are naturally subjected to the French law."

"I know it, sir," replied Monte-Cristo; "but when I visit a country I begin to study, by all the means which are available, the men from whom I may have anything to hope or to fear, until I know them as well, perhaps better, than they know themselves. It follows from this that the *procureur du roi*, be he who he may, with whom I should have to deal, would assuredly be more embarrassed than I should."

"That is to say," replied Villefort, with hesitation, "that human nature being weak, every man, according to your creed, has committed faults."

"Faults or crimes," responded Monte-Cristo, with a negligent air.

"And that you alone, amongst the men whom you do not recognize as your brothers,— for you have said so," observed Villefort, in a tone that faltered somewhat,— "you alone are perfect."

"No, not perfect," was the count's reply; "only impenetrable, that's all. But let us leave off this strain, sir, if the tone of it is displeasing to you; I am no more disturbed by your justice than are you by my second-sight."

"No! no! — by no means," said Villefort, who was afraid of seeming to abandon his ground. "No; by your brilliant and almost sublime conversation you have elevated me above the ordinary level; we no longer talk, we rise to dissertation. But you know how the theologians in their collegiate chairs, and philosophers in their controversies, occasionally say cruel truths; let us suppose for the moment that we are theologizing in a social way, or even philosophically, and I will say to you, rude as it may seem, 'My brother, you sacrifice greatly to pride; you may be above others, but above you there is God.'"

"Above us all, sir," was Monte-Cristo's response, in a tone and with an emphasis so deep that Villefort involuntarily shuddered. "I have my pride for men — serpents always ready to erect themselves against every one who may pass without crushing them. But I lay aside that pride before God, who has taken me from nothing to make me what I am."

"Then, *Monsieur le Comte*, I admire you," said Villefort, who, for the first time in this strange conversation, used the aristocratical form to the unknown personage, whom, until now, he had only called *monsieur*. "Yes, and I say to you, if you are really strong, really superior, really holy, or impenetrable, which you were right in saying amounts to the same thing — be proud, sir, that is the characteristic of predominance. But you have unquestionably some ambition."

"I have, sir."

"And what may it be?"

"I too, as happens to every man once in his life, have been taken by Satan into the highest mountain in the earth, and when there he showed me all the kingdoms of the earth, and as he said before, so said he to me, 'Son of man, what wouldst thou have to make thee adore me?' I reflected long, for a gnawing ambition had long preyed upon me, and then I replied, 'Listen,— I have always heard tell of Providence, and yet I have never seen him, nor anything that resembles him, or which can make me believe that he exists. I wish to be Providence myself, for I feel that the most beautiful, noblest, most sublime thing in the world is to recompense and punish.' Satan bowed his head, and groaned. 'You mistake,' he said; 'Providence does exist, only you have never seen him, because the child of God is as invisible as the parent. You have seen nothing that resembles him, because he works by secret springs, and moves by hidden ways. All I can do for you is to make you one of the agents of that Providence.' The bargain was concluded. I may sacrifice my soul. But what matters it?" added Monte-Cristo. "If the thing were to do again, I would again do it."

Villefort looked at Monte-Cristo with extreme amazement.

"M. le Comte," he inquired, "have you any relations?"

"No, sir, I am alone in the world."

"So much the worse."

"Why?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"Because then you might witness a spectacle calculated to break down your pride. You say you fear nothing but death?"

"I did not say that I feared it; I only said that that alone could check me."

"And old age."

"My end will be achieved before I grow old."

"And madness."

"I have been nearly mad; and you know the axiom — *non bis in idem.* It is an axiom of criminal law, and, consequently, you understand its full application."

"Sir," continued Villefort, "there is something to fear besides death, old age, and madness. For instance, there is apoplexy — that lightning-stroke which strikes but does not destroy you, and yet after which all is ended. You are still yourself as now, and yet you are yourself no longer; you who, like Ariel, touch on the angelic, are but an inert mass, which, like Caliban, touches on the brutal; and this is called in human tongues, as I tell you, neither more nor less than apoplexy. Come, if

so you will, M. le Comte, and continue this coversation at my house, any day you may be willing to see an adversary capable of understanding and anxious to refute you, and I will show you my father, M. Noirtier de Villefort, one of the most fiery Jacobins of the French Revolution; that is to say, the most remarkable audacity, seconded by a most powerful organization — a man who, perhaps, has not, like yourself, seen all the kingdoms of the earth, but who has helped to overturn one of the most powerful; in fact, a man who, like you, believed himself one of the envoys, not of God, but of a Supreme Being; not of Providence, but of Fate. Well, sir, the rupture of a blood-vessel on the lobe of the brain has destroyed all this — not in a day, not in an hour, but in a second. M. Noirtier, who on the previous night was the old Jacobin, the old senator, the old Carbonaro, laughing at the guillotine, laughing at the cannon, laughing at the dagger — M. Noirtier, playing with revolutions — M. Noirtier, for whom France was a vast chess-board, from which pawns, rooks, knights, and queens were to disappear, so that the king was checkmated — M. Noirtier, so redoubted, was the next morning *poor M. Noirtier*, the helpless old man, at the tender mercies of the weakest creature in the household,— that is, his grandchild, Valentine: a dumb and frozen carcass, in fact, who only lives without suffering, that time may be given to his frame to decompose without his consciousness of his decay."

"Alas, sir!" said Monte-Cristo, "this spectacle is neither strange to my eye nor my thought. I am something of a physician, and have, like my fellows, sought more than once for the soul in living and in dead matter; yet, like Providence, it has remained invisible to my eyes, although present to my heart. A hundred writers since Socrates, Seneca, St. Augustin, and Gall have made, in verse and prose, the comparison you have made, and yet I can well understand that a father's sufferings may effect great changes in the mind of a son. I will call on you, sir, since you bid me contemplate, for the advantage of my pride, this terrible spectacle, which must spread so much sorrow throughout your house."

"It would have done so unquestionably, had not God given me so large a compensation. In presence of the old man, who is dragging his way to the tomb, are two children just entering into life — Valentine, the daughter by my first wife, Mademoiselle Renée de Saint-Méran, and Edward, the boy whose life you have this day saved."

"And what is your deduction from this compensation, sir?" inquired Monte-Cristo.

"My deduction is," replied Villefort, "that my father, led away by his passions, has committed some fault unknown to human justice, but marked by the justice of God. That God, desirous in his mercy to punish but one person, has visited this justice on him alone."

Monte-Cristo, with a smile on his lips, had yet a roar at his heart, which would have made Villefort fly had he but heard it.

"Adieu, sir," said the magistrate, who had risen from his seat; "I leave you, bearing a remembrance of you — a remembrance of esteem, which I hope will not be disagreeable to you when you know me better; for I am not a man to bore my friends, as you will learn. Besides, you have made an eternal friend of Madame de Villefort."

The count bowed, and contented himself with seeing Villefort to the door of his cabinet, the *procureur* being escorted to his carriage by two footmen, who, on a signal from their master, followed him with every mark of attention. When he had gone, Monte-Cristo drew a hard breath from his oppressed bosom, and said:

"Enough of this poison; let me now seek the antidote."

Then sounding his bell, he said to Ali, who entered:

"I am going to visit madame — have the carriage ready at one o'clock."

CHAPTER XLIX

HAYDÉE

IT will be recollected that the new, or rather old, acquaintances of the Count of Monte-Cristo, residing in the Rue Meslay, were no other than Maximilian, Jules, and Emmanuel.

The very anticipations of delight to be enjoyed in his forthcoming visits—the bright, pure gleam of heavenly happiness it diffused over the almost deadly warfare in which he had voluntarily engaged—illumined his whole countenance with a look of ineffable joy and calmness, as, immediately after the departure of Villefort, his thoughts flew back to the cheering prospect before him, of tasting, at least, a brief respite from the fierce and stormy passions of his mind. Even Ali, who had hastened to obey the count's summons, went forth from his master's presence in charmed amazement at the unusual animation and pleasure depicted on features ordinarily so stern and cold; while, as though dreading to put to flight the agreeable ideas hovering over his patron's meditations, whatever they were, the faithful Nubian walked on tiptoe toward the door, holding his breath, lest its faintest sound should dissipate his master's happy reverie.

It was the hour of noon, and Monte-Cristo had set apart one hour to be devoted to Haydée; as though his so-long-crushed spirit could not all at once admit the feeling of pure and unmixed joy, but required to be prepared to receive full and perfect happiness, in the same manner as ordinary natures demand to be inured by degrees to strong sensations.

The young Greek, as we have already stated, occupied apartments wholly unconnected with those of the count. The rooms had been fitted up in strict accordance with the Eastern style; that is to say, the floors were covered with the richest carpets Turkey could produce; the walls hung with brocaded silk of the most magnificent designs and texture; while, around each chamber, luxurious divans were placed, with piles of soft and yielding cushions, that needed only to be arranged at the pleasure or convenience of such as sought repose.

Haydée's establishment consisted of three French attendants, and a fourth, who was a Greek. The three first remained constantly in a small waiting-room, ready to obey the first sound of a small golden bell, or to receive the orders of the Romaic slave, who knew just sufficient French to be enabled to transmit her mistress's orders to the three other waiting-women, who had received instructions from Monte-Cristo to treat Haydée with all deference they would observe to a queen.

The fair Greek herself was in the apartment forming the extremity of the suite of rooms. It was a species of boudoir, circular, and lighted only from the top, which consisted of pale pink glass. Haydée was reclining upon cushions, covered with blue satin spotted with silver; her head, supported by one of her exquisitely molded arms, rested on the divan, while the other was employed in adjusting to her lips the coral tube of a rich narguileh, whose flexible pipe permitted not the vapor to ascend until fully impregnated with the rich perfumed water. Her attitude, though perfectly natural for an Eastern female, would have been deemed too coquettish in a European.

Her dress, which was that of the women of Epirus, consisted of a pair of white satin trousers, embroidered with pink roses, displaying feet like an infant's, that might well have been taken for Parian marble, had not the eye been undeceived by their shifting in and out of the slippers beautifully ornamented with gold and pearls, and turned up at the point; a blue and white-striped vest, with long open sleeves, trimmed with silver loops and buttons of pearls. She also wore a species of bodice, which exhibited the whole of the throat and upper part of the bosom; three magnificent diamond clasps fastened it where requisite. The junction of the bodice and drawers was entirely concealed by one of those many-colored scarfs whose brilliant hues and rich silken fringe have rendered them so precious in the eyes of Parisian belles.

A small cap of gold, embroidered with pearls, was placed on one side of the head; while, on the other, a natural rose, of purple, shone out amid hair so black as to seem almost blue.

The extreme beauty of the countenance was purely Grecian; there were the large, dark, melting eyes, the finely formed nose, the coral lips, and pearly teeth, that belonged to her race and country.

And to complete the whole, Haydée was in the very springtide and fullness of youthful charms — she had not yet numbered more than nineteen or twenty summers.

Monte-Cristo summoned her Greek attendant, and bade her inquire whether it would be agreeable to her mistress to receive his visit.

Haydée's only reply was to direct her servant by a sign to withdraw the tapestried curtain that hung before the door, the opening thus made serving as a frame to the graceful tableau.

As Monte-Cristo approached, she leaned upon the elbow of the arm that held the narguileh, and extending to him her other hand, said, with a smile, in the sonorous language spoken by the maids of Athens and Sparta:

"Why demand permission ere you enter? Are you no longer my master, or have I ceased to be your slave?"

Monte-Cristo returned her smile.

"Haydée," said he, "you well know."

"Why do you address me so coldly—so distantly?" asked the fair Greek. "Have I by any means displeased you? Oh, if so, punish me as you will; but do not—do not speak to me in tones so formal!"

"Listen to me, Haydée," replied the count. "You know that we are now in France, and that you are consequently free!"

"Free!" repeated the fair girl. "Of what use would freedom be to me?"

"It would enable you to quit me."

"Quit you! Wherefore should I do so?"

"That is not for me to say; but we are now about to mix in society—to visit and to be visited."

"I desire to see no one but yourself."

"And should you see one whom you could prefer, think not I would be so selfish as to ——"

"No, no!" answered Haydée, with energetic warmth, "that can never be. No man could appear charming in my eyes but yourself. None save yourself and my father have ever possessed my affection."

"My poor child!" replied Monte-Cristo, "that is merely because your father and myself are the only men with whom you have ever conversed."

"And what care I for all others in the world! My father called me his joy,—you style me your love,—and both of you bestowed on me the endearing appellation of your child!"

"Do you remember your father, Haydée?"

The young Greek smiled.

"He is here, and here," said she, touching her eyes and her heart.

"And where am I?" inquired Monte-Cristo, laughingly.

"You?" cried she, with tones of thrilling tenderness, "you are everywhere!" Monte-Cristo took the delicate hand of the young girl in his, and was about to raise it to his lips, when the simple child of nature hastily withdrew it, and presented her fair cheek instead.

"You now understand, Haydée," said the count, "that from this moment you are absolutely free; that here you exercise unlimited sway, and are at liberty to lay aside or continue the costume of your country, as it may suit your inclination. Within this mansion you are absolute mistress of your actions, and may go abroad or remain in your apartments as may seem most agreeable to you. A carriage waits your orders, and Ali and Myrta will accompany you whithersoever you desire to go. There is but one favor I would entreat of you."

"Oh, speak!"

"Preserve the secret of your birth. Make no allusion to the past; nor upon any occasion be induced to pronounce the names of your illustrious father or ill-fated mother!"

"I have already told my lord I will not converse with any one save himself."

"It is possible, Haydée, that this oriental seclusion may not be practicable in Paris. Endeavor, then, to accustom yourself to our manner of living in these northern climes, as you did to those of Rome, Florence, Milan, and Madrid; it may be useful to you one of these days, whether you remain here or return to the East."

The fair girl raised her tearful eyes toward Monte-Cristo, as she said with touching earnestness, "My lord would mean whether *we* return to the East, would he not?"

"My child," returned Monte-Cristo, "you know full well that whenever we part, it will be by no fault or wish of mine; the tree forsakes not the blossom that embellishes it — it is the flower that falls from the tree on which it grew."

"My lord," replied Haydée, "never will I quit you; I could not exist without you."

"My poor girl, in ten years I shall be old; you will be still young."

"My father had numbered sixty years, and the snows of age were on his head, but I admired and loved him far better than all the gay, handsome youths I saw."

"Then tell me, Haydée, do you believe you shall be able to accustom yourself to our present mode of life?"

"Shall I see you?"

"Every day."

"Then what does my lord apprehend for me?"

"I fear your growing weary."

"Nay, my lord, that cannot be. In the morning, I shall think of your coming, and in the evening remember that you have been here; then, too, when alone, I can call forth mighty pictures of the past, see vast horizons bounded only by Pindus and Olympus. Oh, believe me, that when three great passions, such as sorrow, love, and gratitude, fill the heart, *ennui* can find no place."

"You are a worthy daughter of Epirus, Haydée, charming and poetical. One can see that you descend from that race of goddesses who claim your country as their birthplace. Depend on my care to see that your youth is not blighted, for if you love me as a father, I love you as a child."

"Let not my lord be deceived. I did not love my father as I love you; my love for you is quite different. My father is dead, and I am not dead; while if you were to die, I would die."

The count, with a look of indescribable tenderness, extended his hand to the speaker, who carried it to her lips.

Monte-Cristo, thus soothed and calmed into a befitting state of mind to pay his visit to the Morrels, departed, murmuring as he went these lines of Pindar, "Youth is a flower of which love is the fruit; happy is he who, after having watched its silent growth, is permitted to gather it." The carriage was prepared according to orders, and stepping lightly into it, the count drove off at his usual rapid pace.

CHAPTER L

THE MORREL FAMILY

IN a very few minutes the count reached No. 7 in the Rue Meslay. The house was of white stone, and in a small court before it were two small beds full of beautiful flowers. In the concierge that opened the gate the count recognized Cocles; but as he had but one eye, and that eye had considerably weakened in the course of nine years, Cocles did not so readily recognize the count.

The carriages that drove up to the door were compelled to turn, to avoid a fountain that played in a basin of rock-work, in which sported a quantity of gold and silver fishes, an ornament that had excited the jealousy of the whole quarter, and had gained for the house the appellation of "*le Petit Versailles*." The house, raised above the kitchens and cellars, had, besides the ground-floor, two stories and attics. The whole of the property, consisting of an immense atelier, two pavilions at the bottom of the garden, and the garden itself, had been purchased by Emmanuel, who had seen at a glance that he could make a profitable speculation of it. He had reserved the house and half the garden, and building a wall between the garden and the workshops, had let them upon lease with the pavilions at the bottom of the garden, so that for a trifling sum he was as well lodged and as perfectly shut out from observation as the inhabitants of the finest hotel in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

The breakfast-room was of oak; the salon of mahogany and blue velvet; the bedroom of citronwood and green damask; there was a study for Emmanuel, who never studied, and a music-room for Julie, who never played. The whole of the second story was set apart for Maximilian; it was precisely the same as his sister's apartments, except that the breakfast-parlor was changed into a billiard-room, where he received his friends. He was superintending the dressing of his horse, and smoking his cigar at the entrance of the garden, when the count's carriage stopped at the door.

Cocles opened the gate, and Baptistin, springing from the box, inquired whether M. and Madame Herbaut and M. Maximilian Morrel would see M. le Comte de Monte-Cristo.

"M. le Comte de Monte-Cristo?" cried Morrel, throwing away his cigar and hastening to the carriage; "I should think we would see him. Ah! a thousand thanks, M. le Comte, for not having forgotten your promise."

And the young officer shook the count's hand so warmly, that the latter could not be mistaken as to the sincerity of his joy, and he saw that he had been expected with impatience, and was received with pleasure.

"Come, come!" said Maximilian, "I will serve as your guide: such a man as you are ought not to be introduced by a servant. My sister is in the garden plucking the dead roses; my brother reading his two papers, *la Presse* and *les Débats*, within five steps of her, for wherever you see Madame Herbaut, you have only to look within a circle of four yards and you will find M. Emmanuel, and, 'reciprocally,' as they say at the Ecole Polytechnique."

At the sound of their steps a young woman of twenty to five-and-twenty, dressed in a silk robe-de-chambre, and busily engaged in plucking the dead leaves off the splendid rose-tree, raised her head. This was Julie, who had become, as the clerk of the house of Thomson and French had predicted, Madame Emmanuel Herbaut. She uttered a cry of surprise at the sight of a stranger, and Maximilian began to laugh.

"Don't disturb yourself, Julie," said he. "M. le Comte has only been two or three days in Paris, but he already knows what a lady of the Marais is, and if he does not, you will show him."

"Ah, monsieur!" returned Julie, "it is treason in my brother to bring you thus, but he never has any regard for his poor sister. Penelon! Penelon!"

An old man, who was digging busily at one of the beds of roses, stuck his spade in the earth, and approached cap in hand, and striving to conceal a quid of tobacco he had just thrust into his cheek. A few locks of gray mingled with his hair, which was still thick and matted, whilst his bronze features and determined glance announced the old sailor who had braved the heat of the equator and the storms of the tropics.

"I think you hailed me, Mademoiselle Julie?" said he.

Penelon had still preserved the habit of calling his master's daughter "Mademoiselle Julie," and had never been able to change the name to Madame Herbaut.

"Penelon," replied Julie, "go and inform M. Emmanuel of this gentleman's visit, and Maximilian will conduct him to the salon."

Then turning to Monte-Cristo,—"I hope you will permit me to leave you for a few minutes," continued she; and without awaiting any reply, disappeared behind a clump of trees, and entered the house by a lateral alley.

"I am sorry to see," observed Monte-Cristo to Morrel, "that I cause no small disturbance in your house."

"Look there," said Maximilian, laughing; "there is her husband changing his jacket for a coat. I assure you, you are well known in the Rue Meslay."

"Your family appears to me a very happy one!" said the count, as if speaking to himself.

"Oh, yes, I assure you, M. le Comte, they want nothing that can render them happy; they are young and cheerful, they are tenderly attached to each other, and with twenty-five thousand francs a year they fancy themselves as rich as Rothschild."

"Five-and-twenty thousand francs is not a large sum, however," replied Monte-Cristo, with a tone so sweet and gentle that it went to Maximilian's heart like the voice of a father; "but they will not be content with that. Your brother-in-law is a barrister? a doctor?"

"He was a merchant, M. le Comte, and had succeeded to the business of my poor father. M. Morrel, at his death, left five hundred thousand francs, which were divided between my sister and myself, for we were his only children. Her husband, who, when he married her, had no other patrimony than his noble probity, his first-rate ability, and his spotless reputation, wished to possess as much as his wife. He labored and toiled until he had amassed two hundred and fifty thousand francs; six years sufficed to achieve this object. Oh, I assure you, M. le Comte, it was a touching spectacle to see these young creatures, destined by their talents for higher stations, toiling together, and who, unwilling to change any of the customs of their paternal house, took six years to accomplish that which innovators would have effected in two or three. Marseilles resounded with their well-earned praises. At last, one day, Emmanuel came to his wife, who had just finished making up the accounts.

"'Julie,' said he to her, 'Cocles has just given me the last rouleau of a hundred francs; that completes the two hundred and fifty thousand francs we had fixed as the limits of our gains. Can you content yourself with the small fortune which we shall possess for the future? Listen to me. Our house transacts business to the amount of a million a year, from which we derive an income of forty thousand francs. We can dispose of the business, if we please, in an hour, for I have received a letter from M. Delaunay, in which he offers to purchase the good-will of the house, to unite with his own, for three hundred thousand francs. Advise me what I had better do.'

"'Emmanuel,' returned my sister, 'the house of Morrel can only be carried on by a Morrel. Is it not worth three hundred thousand francs to save our father's name from the chances of evil fortune and failure?'

"'I thought so,' replied Emmanuel; 'but I wished to have your advice.'

"'This is my counsel:—Our accounts are made up and our bills paid; all we have to do is to stop the issue of any more and close our office.'

"This was done instantly. It was three o'clock; at a quarter-past, a merchant presented himself to insure two ships; it was a clear profit of fifteen thousand francs. 'Monsieur,' said Emmanuel, 'have the goodness to address yourself to M. Delaunay. We have quitted business.'

"'How long?' inquired the astonished merchant.

Madame Emmanuel Herbaut.

"'A quarter of an hour,' was the reply.

"And this is the reason, monsieur," continued Maximilian, "of my sister and brother-in-law having only twenty-five thousand francs a year."

Maximilian had scarcely finished his story, during which the count's heart had seemed ready to burst, when Emmanuel entered, clad in a hat and coat. He saluted the count with the air of a man who is aware of the rank of his guest; then, after having led Monte-Cristo round the little garden, he returned to the house.

A large vase of Japan porcelain, filled with flowers that impregnated the air with their perfume, stood in the salon. Julie, suitably dressed, and her hair arranged (she had accomplished this feat in less than ten minutes), received the count on his entrance. The songs of the birds were heard in an aviary hard by — the branches of false ebony-trees and rose acacias forming the border of the blue velvet curtains. Everything in this charming retreat, from the warble of the birds to the smile of the mistress, breathed tranquillity and repose.

The count had felt, from the moment he entered the house, the influence of this happiness, and he remained silent and pensive, forgetting that he was expected to recommence the conversation, which had ceased after the first salutations had been exchanged. He perceived the pause, and, by a violent effort, tearing himself from his pleasing reverie,—

"Madame," said he, at length, "I pray you to excuse my emotion, which must astonish you who are only accustomed to the happiness I meet here; but satisfaction is so new a sight to me, that I could never be weary of looking at yourself and your husband."

"We are very happy, monsieur," replied Julie; "but we have also known unhappiness, and few have ever undergone more bitter sufferings than ourselves."

The count's features displayed an expression of the most intense curiosity.

"Oh, all this is a family history, as Château-Renaud told you the other day," observed Maximilian. "This humble picture would have but little interest for you, accustomed, as you are, to behold the pleasures and the misfortunes of the wealthy and the illustrious; but such as we are, we have experienced bitter sorrows."

"And God has poured balm into your wounds, as he does to all those who are in affliction?" said Monte-Cristo, inquiringly.

"Yes, M. le Comte," returned Julie, "we may indeed say he has, for he has done for us what he grants only to his chosen; he sent us one of his angels."

The count's cheeks became scarlet, and he coughed, in order to have an excuse for putting his handkerchief to his mouth.

"Those born to wealth, and who have the means of gratifying every wish," said Emmanuel, "know not what is the real happiness of life;

just as those who have been tossed on the stormy ocean on a few frail planks can alone estimate the value of a clear sky."

Monte-Cristo rose, and without making any answer (for the tremulousness of his voice would have betrayed his emotion), walked up and down the apartment with a slow step.

"Our magnificence makes you smile, M. le Comte," said Maximilian, who had followed him with his eyes.

"No, no," returned Monte-Cristo, pale as death, pressing one hand on his heart to still its throbbings, whilst with the other he pointed to a crystal cover, beneath which a silken purse lay on a black velvet cushion. "I was wondering what could be the use of this purse, which contains a paper at one end and at the other a large diamond."

"M. le Comte," replied Maximilian, with an air of gravity, "those are our most precious family treasures."

"The stone seems very brilliant," answered the count.

"Oh, my brother does not allude to its value, although it has been estimated at one hundred thousand francs; he means that the articles contained in this purse are the relics of the angel I spoke of just now."

"This I do not comprehend; and yet I may not ask for an explanation, madame," replied Monte-Cristo, bowing. "Pardon me, I had no intention of committing an indiscretion."

"Indiscretion!—oh, you make us happy by giving us an occasion of expatiating on this subject. Did we intend to conceal the noble action this purse commemorates, we should not expose it thus. Oh! would we could relate it everywhere, and to every one, so that the emotion of our unknown benefactor might reveal his presence."

"Ah! really," said Monte-Cristo, in a half-stifled voice.

"Monsieur," returned Maximilian, raising the glass cover, and respectfully kissing the silken purse, "this has touched the hand of a man who saved my father from suicide, us from ruin, and our name from shame and disgrace,—a man by whose matchless benevolence we, poor children, doomed to want and wretchedness, can at present hear every one envying our happy lot. This letter" (as he spoke, Maximilian drew a letter from the purse and gave it to the count)—"this letter was written by him the day that my father had taken a desperate resolution, and this diamond was given by the generous unknown to my sister as her dowry."

Monte-Cristo opened the letter, and read it with an indescribable feeling of delight. It was the letter written (as our readers know) to Julie, and signed "Sindbad the Sailor."

"Unknown, you say, is the man who rendered you this service—unknown to you?"

"Yes; we have never had the happiness of pressing his hand," continued Maximilian. "We have supplicated Heaven in vain to grant us this favor, but all the affair has had a mysterious direction we cannot comprehend — all has been guided by a hand invisible, but powerful as that of an enchanter."

"Oh!" cried Julie, "I have not lost all hope of some day kissing that hand, as I now kiss the purse which he has touched. Four years ago, Penelon was at Trieste — Penelon, M. le Comte, is the old sailor you saw in the garden, and who, from quartermaster, has become gardener. Penelon, when he was at Trieste, saw on the quay an Englishman, who was on the point of embarking on board a yacht, and he recognized him as the person who called on my father the 5th of June, 1829, and who wrote me this letter on the 5th of September. He felt convinced of his identity, but he did not venture to address him."

"An Englishman!" said Monte-Cristo, who grew uneasy at the attention with which Julie looked at him. "An Englishman, you say?"

"Yes," replied Maximilian, "an Englishman, who represented himself as the confidential clerk of the house of Thomson and French, at Rome. It was this that made me start when you said the other day, at M. de Morcerf's, that Messrs. Thomson and French were your bankers. That happened, as I told you, in 1829. For God's sake, tell me, did you know this Englishman?"

"But you tell me also, that the house of Thomson and French have constantly denied having rendered you this service?"

"Yes."

"Then is it not probable that this Englishman may be some one who, grateful for a kindness your father had shown him, and which he himself had forgotten, has taken this method of requiting the obligation?"

"Everything is possible on such an occasion, even a miracle."

"What was his name?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"He gave no other name," answered Julie, looking earnestly at the count, "than that at the end of his letter — 'Sindbad the Sailor.'"

"Which is evidently not his real name, but a fictitious one."

Then noticing that Julia was struck with the sound of his voice —

"Tell me," continued he, "was he not about my height, perhaps a little taller, his chin imprisoned, to use the word, in a high cravat; his coat closely buttoned up, and constantly taking out his pencil?"

"Oh, do you then know him?" cried Julie, whose eyes sparkled with joy.

"No," returned Monte-Cristo, "I only guessed. I knew a Lord Wilmore, who was constantly doing actions of this kind."

"Without revealing himself?"

"He was an eccentric being, and did not believe in the existence of gratitude."

"Oh, Heaven!" exclaimed Julie, clasping her hands. "In what did he believe, then?"

Penelon.

"He did not credit it at the period when I knew him," said Monte-Cristo, touched to the heart by the accents of Julie's voice; "but, perhaps, since then he has had proofs that gratitude does exist."

"And do you know this gentleman, monsieur?" inquired Emmanuel.

"Oh, if you do know him," cried Julie, "can you tell us where he is—where we can find him? Maximilian—Emmanuel—if we do but discover him, he must believe in the gratitude of the heart?"

Monte-Cristo felt tears start into his eyes, and he again walked hastily up and down the room.

"In the name of Heaven!" said Maximilian, "if you know anything of him, tell us what it is."

"Alas!" cried Monte-Cristo, striving to repress his emotion. "If Lord Wilmore was your unknown benefactor, I fear you will never again see him. I parted from him, two years ago, at Palermo, and he was then on the point of setting out for the most remote regions; so that I fear he will never return."

"Oh, monsieur, this is cruel of you," said Julie, much affected; and the young lady's eyes swam with tears.

"Madame," replied Monte-Cristo, gravely, and gazing earnestly on the two liquid pearls that trickled down Julie's cheeks, "had Lord Wilmore seen what I now see, he would become attached to life, for the tears you shed would reconcile him to mankind." And he held out his hand to Julie, who gave him hers, carried away by the look and accent of the count.

"But," continued she, "Lord Wilmore had a family or friends; he must have known some one; can we not ——"

"Oh, it is useless to inquire," returned the count; "he was not the man you seek for, he was my friend; he had no secrets from me, and he would have confided this also to me.

"And he told you nothing?"

"Not a word."

"And yet you instantly named him."

"Ah, in such a case one supposes ——"

"Sister, sister," said Maximilian, coming to the count's aid, "monsieur is quite right. Recollect what our excellent father so often told us —'It was no Englishman that thus saved us.'"

Monte-Cristo started. "What did your father tell you, M. Morrel?" said he, eagerly.

"My father thought that this action had been miraculously performed,— he believed that a benefactor had arisen from the grave to save us. Oh, it was a touching superstition, monsieur, and although I did not myself believe it, I would not for the world have destroyed my father's faith in it. How often did he muse over it and pronounce the name of a dear friend — a friend lost to him forever; and on his death-bed, when the near approach of eternity seemed to have illumined his mind with supernatural light, this thought, which had until then been but a doubt, became a conviction, and his last words were, 'Maximilian, it was Edmond Dantès!'"

At these words the count's paleness, which had for some time been increasing, became alarming; he could not speak; he looked at his watch like a man who has forgotten the time; said a few hurried words to Madame Herbaut, and pressing the hands of Emmanuel and Maximilian,—"Madame," said he, "I trust you will allow me to visit you from time to time; I value your friendship, and feel grateful to you for your welcome, for this is the first time for many years that I have thus yielded to my feelings." And he hastily quitted the apartment.

"This Count of Monte-Cristo is a singular man," said Emmanuel.

"Yes," answered Maximilian, "but I feel sure he has an excellent heart, and that he likes us."

"His voice went to my heart," observed Julie, "and two or three times I fancied I had heard it before."

CHAPTER LI

PYRAMUS AND THISBE

ABOUT the center of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and at the back of one of the most distinguished-looking mansions in this rich neighborhood, extended a large garden, whose widely spreading chestnut-trees raised their heads above the walls, high and solid as those of a rampart, scattering, each spring, a shower of delicate pink and white blossoms into the large stone vases placed at equal distances upon the two square pilasters, supporting an iron gate, of the reign of Louis XIV.

This noble entrance, however, spite of its striking appearance and the graceful effect of the geraniums planted in the two vases, as they waved in the wind their variegated leaves and their scarlet bloom, had fallen into utter disuse, from the period when the proprietors of the hotel (and many years had elapsed since then) had confined themselves to the possession of the hotel with its thickly planted court-yard, opening into the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the garden shut in by this gate, which formerly communicated with a fine kitchen-garden of about an acre in extent.

But the demon of speculation having drawn a line, or in other words projected a street, at the extremity of this kitchen-garden, and even before the foundations of the said street were dug, its name being duly affixed upon an iron plate at the corner of the situation chosen, it was resolved to sell this kitchen-garden and build in the street, which was to rival the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, that great artery of Paris.

In matters of speculation, however, though "*man* proposes," yet "*money* disposes." The newly named street died almost in birth, and the purchaser of the "kitchen-garden," having paid a high price for it, could not resell it for the same sum; yet, still clinging to the belief that at some future day he should obtain a sum for it that would repay him, not only for his past outlay, but also for the interest upon the capital, contented himself with letting the ground temporarily to some market gardeners, at a yearly rent of five hundred francs.

Thus, then, as already stated, the iron gate leading into the kitchen-garden had been closed up and left to the rust; while, to prevent the ignoble diggers and delvers of the ground from presuming to sully with their looks the aristocratical inclosure belonging to the hotel, the gate in question had been boarded up to a height of six feet. True, the planks were not so closely adjusted but that a hasty peep might be obtained between their interstices; but the strict decorum and rigid propriety of the inhabitants of the hotel left no grounds for apprehending that advantage would be taken of that circumstance.

In the deserted kitchen-garden, in place of cabbages and carrots, pears and melons, a scanty crop of lucern alone bore evidence of its being deemed worthy of cultivation. A small, low door gave egress from the walled space we have been describing, into the projected street, the ground having been abandoned as unproductive by its various renters, and had now fallen so completely in general estimation as to return not even a fraction of the poor half of one per cent. it had originally paid. Toward the hotel the chestnut-trees we have before mentioned rose high above the wall, without in any way affecting the growth of other luxuriant shrubs and flowers that eagerly pressed forward to fill up the vacant spaces, as though asserting their right to air. At one corner, where the foliage became so thick as almost to shut out day, a large stone bench and sundry rustic seats indicated that this sheltered spot was either in general favor or particular use by some inhabitant of the hotel, which was faintly discernible through the dense mass of verdure that partially concealed it though situated but a hundred paces off.

Whoever had selected this retired portion of the grounds was abundantly justified in his choice by the absence of all glare—the cool, refreshing shade — the screen it afforded from the scorching rays of the sun, that found no entrance there even during the burning days of hottest summer—the incessant and melodious warbling of birds, and the entire removal from either the noise of the street or the bustle of the hotel. On the evening of one of the warmest days spring had yet bestowed on the inhabitants of Paris, might be seen, negligently thrown upon the stone bench, a book, a parasol, and a work-basket, from which hung a partly embroidered cambric handkerchief, while, at a little distance from these articles, was a young girl, standing close to the iron gate, endeavoring to discern something on the other side by means of the openings in the planks.

At that instant, the little side-door leading from the waste ground to the street was noiselessly opened, and a tall, powerful young man, dressed in a common gray blouse and velvet cap, but whose carefully arranged hair, beard and mustaches, all of the glossiest black, but ill accorded with his plebeian attire, after casting a rapid glance around him, in order to assure himself he was unobserved, entered by this door, and carefully closing it after him, proceeded with a hurried step toward the iron gate.

At the sight of him she expected, though probably not under such a costume, the girl started in terror, and was about to retreat. But the eye of love had already seen, even through the narrow chinks of the wooden palisades, the movement of the white robe and of the blue sash. Pressing his lips to the planks, he exclaimed:

"Fear nothing, Valentine — it is I!"

Again the girl returned, saying as she did so:

"And wherefore come you so late to-day? It is almost the dinner-hour, and I have been compelled to exercise my utmost skill to get rid of my step-mother's spying as well as the espionage of my maid, and of the troublesome society of my brother, under pretense of coming hither to work at my embroidery, which, I fear, I am in no hurry to finish. So pray excuse yourself as well as you can for having made me wait, and, after that, tell me why I see you in so singular a dress, that at first I did not recognize you."

"Dearest Valentine," said the young man, "the difference between our stations makes me fear to speak of my love, but yet I cannot find myself in your presence without longing to tell you how I adore you, so that the echo of my own words may linger in my heart when I see you no longer. Now, I thank you for chiding me, for it leaves me a hope, that if not expecting me, at least I was in your thoughts. You asked me the cause of my being late, as also why I come thus disguised. I will explain both. I have chosen a trade."

"A trade! Oh, Maximilian, how can you jest at a time when we have such deep cause for uneasiness?"

"Heaven keep me from jesting with that which is far dearer to me than life itself! Tired out with ranging fields and scaling walls, and seriously alarmed at the idea suggested by yourself, that your father would very likely have me sent to prison as a thief, which would compromise the honor of the whole French army, alarmed too, at the possibility of being seen always prowling around this spot where there is no citadel to besiege and no blockhouse to defend; from a captain of Spahis I have become a gardener, and, consequently, adopted the costume of my calling."

"What nonsense!"

"It is the wisest action of my life, for it gives us security."

"Come! Tell me what you mean."

"Simply, that having ascertained that the piece of ground was to let, I made application for it, was accepted, and am now master of this crop of lucern! Valentine! There is nothing now to prevent my building myself a little hut on my plantation, and residing not twenty yards from you. Only imagine what happiness that would afford me. I can scarcely contain myself. But would you believe that I purchase

all this delight, joy, and happiness, for which I would cheerfully have surrendered ten years of my life, at the small cost of five hundred francs per annum, paid quarterly! Henceforth we have nothing to fear. I am on my own ground, and have a right to place a ladder against the wall, and to look over when I please, without having any apprehensions of the police. I may also enjoy the privilege of assuring you of my love, unless, indeed, it offends your pride to listen to love from the lips of a poor working-man, clad in a blouse and cap."

A faint cry of mingled pleasure and surprise escaped from the lips of Valentine, who almost instantly said, in a saddened tone, as though some envious cloud darkened the joy which illumined her heart:

"Alas! Maximilian, this must not be! We should presume too much on our own strength, and, like others, perhaps, be led astray by our blind confidence in each other's prudence."

"How can you say that, dear Valentine? Have I not, from the first blessed hour of our acquaintance, schooled all my words and actions to your sentiments and ideas? And you have, I am sure, the fullest confidence in my honor. When you spoke to me of your experiencing a vague and indefinite sense of coming danger, I placed myself blindly and devotedly at your service, asking no other reward than the pleasure of being useful to you; and have I ever since, by word or look, given you cause of regret for having selected me from the numbers that would willingly have sacrificed their lives for you? You told me, my dear Valentine, that you were engaged to M. d'Epinay, and that your father was resolved upon completing the match, and that from his will there was no appeal, as M. de Villefort was never known to change a determination once formed. I kept in the background, as you wished, waiting not the decision of your heart or my own, but hoping Providence would graciously interpose in our behalf, and order events in our favor. Nevertheless you love me, Valentine, and you have told me so; thanks for your kind words. To hear you repeat them from time to time is all I ask, to make me forget all my disquietudes."

"Ah, Maximilian, that is the very thing that makes you so bold, and which renders me at once so happy and unhappy, that I frequently ask myself which is better for me the harshness of my step-mother, and her blind preference for her own child, or the pleasure I find in our meetings, so fraught with danger to both."

"I will not admit that word," returned the young man; "it is at once cruel and unjust. Is it possible to find a more submissive slave than myself? You have permitted me to converse with you from time to time, Valentine, but forbidden my ever following you in your walks or elsewhere — have I not obeyed? And since I found means to enter this inclosure to exchange a few words with you through this door,—to be close to you without being enabled to obtain a view of your features,—have I even solicited to touch the tip of your glove through the bars? Do you think that at my age, and with my strength, this wall that now parts us would keep me from your side one instant, were it not that my respect for your wishes presents an impassable barrier? Never has a complaint or a murmur of your rigor escaped me. I have been bound by my promises as rigidly as any knight of olden times. Confess that, lest I be tempted to call you unjust."

Valentine.

"It is true," said Valentine, as she passed the end of her slender fingers through a small opening in the planks, thus permitting her lover to press them with his lips, "and you are a true and faithful friend; but still you acted from motives of self-interest, my dear Maximilian, for you well knew that from the moment in which you had manifested an opposite spirit, all would have been ended between us. You promised to bestow on me the friendly affection of a brother—I, who have no friend but yourself upon earth, who am neglected and forgotten by my father, persecuted by my step-mother, and left to the sole companionship of a paralyzed and speechless old man, whose withered hand can no longer press mine, and whose eye alone converses with me, while, doubtless, there still lingers in his heart some tenderness. Oh, how bitter a fate is mine, to serve either as a victim or an enemy to all who are stronger than myself, while my only friend and supporter is but a living corpse! Indeed, indeed, Maximilian, I am very miserable, and you are right to love me for myself alone."

"Dear Valentine," replied the young man, deeply affected, "I will not say you are all I love in the world, for I dearly prize my sister and brother-in-law; but my affection for them is calm and tranquil, in no manner resembling that I feel for you. At the mere thought of you my heart beats more quickly, my blood flows with increased rapidity through my veins, and my breast heaves with tumultuous emotions; but I solemnly promise you to restrain all this ardor, this fervor and intensity of feeling, until you yourself shall require me to render them available in serving or assisting you. M. Franz is not expected to return home for a year to come, I am told; in that time many favorable and unforeseen chances may befriend us. Let us, then, hope for the best; hope is so sweet a comforter. Meanwhile, Valentine, while reproaching me with selfishness, think a little what you have been to me—the beautiful but cold resemblance of a marble Venus. What promise of future reward have you made me for all the submission and obedience I have evinced?—none whatever. What granted me?—scarcely more. You tell me of M. Franz d'Epinay, your betrothed lover, and you shrink from the idea of being his wife; but tell me, Valentine, is there no other sorrow in your heart? You see me devoted to you, body and soul; my life and each warm drop that circles round my heart are consecrated to your service; you know full well that my existence is bound up in yours—that were I to lose you I would not outlive the hour of such crushing misery; yet you speak with calmness of the prospect of your being the wife of another! Oh, Valentine! were I in your place, and did I feel conscious, as you do, of being worshiped, adored, with such a love as mine, a hundred times at least should I have passed my hand between these iron bars, and said to poor Maximilian, 'Take this hand, dearest Maximilian, and believe that, living or dead, I am yours—yours only, and forever!'"

The poor girl made no reply, but her lover could plainly hear her sobs and tears. A rapid change took place in the young man's feelings.

"Dearest, dearest Valentine!" exclaimed he, "forgive me if I have offended you, and forget the words I spoke if they have unwittingly caused you pain."

"No, Maximilian, I am not offended," answered she; "but do you not see what a helpless being I am, almost a stranger and an outcast in my father's house, where even he is seldom seen; whose will has been broken, from the age of ten years, beneath the iron rod of my masters, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute; no person has observed my sufferings, nor have I ever breathed one word on the subject save to yourself. Outwardly and in the eyes of the world, I am surrounded by kindness and affection; but the reverse is the case. The general remark is, 'Oh, it cannot be expected that one of so stern a character as M. Villefort could lavish the tenderness some fathers do on their daughters. But she has had the happiness to find a second mother in Madame de Villefort.' The world, however, is mistaken; my father abandons me from utter indifference, while my step-mother detests me with a hatred so much the more terrible as it is veiled beneath a continual smile."

"Hate you, sweet Valentine!" exclaimed the young man; "how is it possible for any one to do that!"

"Alas!" replied the weeping girl, "I am obliged to own that her aversion to me arises from a very natural source—her love for her own child, my brother Edward."

"But why should it?"

"Nay, I know not; but, though unwilling to introduce money matters into our conversation, I will just say thus much—that her extreme dislike to me has its origin in mercenary motives; and I much fear she envies me the fortune I already enjoy in right of my mother, and which will be more than doubled at the death of M. and Mme. Méran, whose sole heiress I am. Alas! how gladly would I exchange the half of this wealth for the happiness of at least sharing my father's love, so that it would obtain me a happy and affectionate home."

"Poor Valentine!"

"I seem to myself as though living a life of bondage, yet at the same time am so conscious of my own weakness that I fear to break the restraint in which I am held, lest I fall utterly powerless and helpless. Then, too, my father is not a person whose orders may be infringed with impunity; protected as he is by his high position and firmly established reputation, he is all powerful against me, against you, even against his king. Dear Maximilian, I assure you that I attempt not to resist, more on your account than my own, for I would not peril your safety."

"But wherefore, Valentine, do you view everything through so gloomy a medium—why picture the future so fraught with evil?"

"Because I judge it from the past."

"Still, consider that although I may not be, strictly speaking, what is termed an illustrious match for you, I am, for many reasons, not altogether so much beneath your alliance. The days when there were two Frances in France exist no longer, and the first families of the monarchy have intermarried with those of the empire. The aristocracy of the lance has allied itself with the nobility of the cannon. Now I belong to this last-named class; and my prospects of military preferment are encouraging. My fortune, though small, is unfettered, and the memory of my late father respected in our country, Valentine, as that of the most upright and honorable merchant of the city. I say our country, because you were born not far from Marseilles."

"Name not Marseilles, I beseech you, Maximilian; that one word brings back my mother to my recollection — my angel mother, whom all regret, who, after watching over her child during the brief period allotted to her in this world, now, I hope, watches over her from the eternal abode on high. Ah, were she still living, we need fear nothing, Maximilian, for I would confide our love to her, and she would aid and protect us."

"I fear, Valentine," replied the lover, "that were she living I should never have had the happiness of knowing you; you would then have been too happy to have stooped from your grandeur to bestow a thought on me."

"It is you who are unjust, now, Maximilian," cried Valentine; "but there is one thing I wish to know."

"And what is that?" inquired the young man, perceiving that Valentine hesitated and seemed at a loss how to proceed.

"Tell me truly, Maximilian, whether in former days, when our fathers dwelt at Marseilles, there ever existed any misunderstanding between them?"

"Not that I am at all aware of," replied the young man, "unless it arose from your father being a zealous partisan of the Bourbons, while mine was wholly devoted to the emperor. Dearest, why do you ask?"

"I will tell you," replied his companion, "for it is but right you should know all. Then I must begin by referring to the day when your being made an officer of the Legion of Honor was publicly announced in the papers. We were all sitting in the apartments of my grandfather,

M. Noirtier; M. Danglars was there also — you recollect M. Danglars, do you not, Maximilian, the banker, whose horses ran away with my step-mother and little brother, and very nearly killed them? While the rest of the company were discussing the approaching marriage of

Mademoiselle Danglars, I was occupied in reading the paper aloud to my grandfather; but when I came to the paragraph concerning you, although I had already read it (you know you had told me all about it the previous evening), I felt so happy, and yet so nervous, at the idea of pronouncing your name aloud, that I should have passed it over, but for the fear that my so doing might create suspicions as to my silence; so I summoned up all my courage, and read it."

"Dear Valentine!"

"Well, would you believe it? directly my father caught the sound of your name he turned round quite hastily, and, like a poor silly thing, I was so persuaded that every one must be as much affected as myself by the utterance of your name, that I was not surprised to see my father tremble; but I even thought (though that surely must have been a mistake) that M. Danglars underwent a similar emotion.

"'Morrel! Morrel!' cried my father, 'stop a bit'; then, knitting his brows into a deep frown, he added, 'Surely this cannot be one of the Morrel family who lived at Marseilles, and gave us so much trouble from their being such violent Bonapartists—I mean about the year 1815.'

"'I fancy,' replied M. Danglars, 'that he is the son of the large shipowner there.'"

"Indeed!" answered Maximilian; "and what said your father then, Valentine?"

"Oh, such a dreadful thing, I dare not repeat it."

"Still!" said the young man, "say, what was it?"

"'Ah,' continued my father, still frowning severely, 'their idolized emperor treated these madmen as they deserved; he called them "*food for cannon*," which was precisely all they were good for; and I am delighted to see that the present government have adopted this salutary principle with vigor; if Algiers were good for nothing else, I would congratulate the government, although it costs us dear.'"

"The sentiments were somewhat unfeeling," said Maximilian; "but do not blush, Valentine; for my father was not a jot behind yours in his expressions. 'Why,' said he, 'does not the emperor, who has devised so many clever things, form a regiment of lawyers, judges, and legal practitioners, sending them in the hottest fire?' You see, Valentine, that for mildness of expression and imaginative benefits there is not much to choose between the parties. But what said M. Danglars to this burst of party spirit on the part of the *procureur du roi?*"

"Oh, he laughed, and in that singular manner so peculiar to himself—half-malicious, half-ferocious; he immediately rose and took his leave; then, for the first time, I observed the agitation of my grandfather, and I must tell you, Maximilian, that I am the only person capable of discerning emotion in his paralyzed frame. And I suspected that the conversation that had been carried on in his presence (for no one ever cares for him, dear old man) had made a strong impression on his mind; for, naturally enough, it must have pained him to hear the emperor spoken of in that manner."

"The name of M. Noirtier," interposed Maximilian, "is celebrated throughout Europe; he was a statesman of high standing; and I know not whether you are aware, Valentine, that he took a leading part in every Bonapartean conspiracy set on foot during the restoration of the Bourbons."

"Oh, I have often heard whispers of things that seem to me most strange — the father a Bonapartist, the son a Royalist. I turned toward my grandfather; he looked at the newspaper. 'What is the matter, dear grandfather?' said I; 'are you pleased?' He gave me a sign in the affirmative. 'With what my father said just now?' He returned a sign in the negative. 'Perhaps you liked what M. Danglars remarked?' Another sign in the negative. 'Oh, then, you are glad to hear that M. Morrel (I durst not pronounce the dear name of Maximilian) had been made an officer of the Legion of Honor? He signified assent in a way that convinced me he was delighted that you, who were a perfect stranger to him, had been made an officer of the Legion of Honor! Perhaps, though, it was a mere whim, for he is almost falling into a second childhood! but, for all that, I love him dearly."

"How singular," murmured Maximilian, "that your father should hate the very mention of my name, while your grandfather, on the contrary — strange, indeed, are party likes and dislikes."

"Hush!" cried Valentine, suddenly, "conceal yourself! — Go, go! Some one comes!"

Maximilian seized his spade and began to dig in his lucern, in the most pitiless manner.

"Mademoiselle! mademoiselle!" exclaimed a voice from behind the trees. "Madame is searching for you everywhere; there are visitors in the drawing-room."

"Who is it?" inquired Valentine, much agitated.

"Oh, mademoiselle! I believe it is some grand prince or lord; they say he was the Count of Monte-Cristo."

"I will come directly," said Valentine aloud.

The name caused a shock on the other side of the iron gate to him on whose ear the "*I will come!*" of Valentine sounded the usual parting knell of all their interviews."

"Now, then," said Maximilian, leaning on the spade, "how comes it that the Count of Monte-Cristo is acquainted with M. de Villefort?"

CHAPTER LII

TOXICOLOGY

IT was really the Count of Monte-Cristo, who had just arrived at Madame de Villefort's for the purpose of returning the visit of the *procureur du roi;* and at this name, as may be easily imagined, the whole house was in confusion.

Madame de Villefort, who was alone in her drawing-room when the count was announced, desired that her son might be brought thither instantly to renew his thanks to the count; and Edward, who heard nothing and nobody talked of for two whole days but this great personage, made all possible haste to come to him, not from obedience to his mother, not from any feeling of gratitude to the count, but from sheer curiosity, and that he might make some remark, by help of which he might find an opportunity for saying one of those small pertnesses which made his mother say:

"Oh, that sad child! but pray excuse him, he is really *so* clever."

After the first and usual civilities, the count inquired after Villefort.

"My husband dines with the chancellor," replied the young wife; "he has just gone, and I am sure he'll be exceedingly sorry not to have had the pleasure of seeing you before he went."

Two visitors who were there when the count arrived, having gazed at him with all their eyes, retired after that reasonable delay which politeness admits and curiosity requires.

"Ah! what is your sister Valentine doing?" inquired Madame de Villefort of Edward; "tell some one to bid her come here, that I may have the honor of introducing her to the count."

"You have a daughter, then, madame?" inquired the count; "very young, I presume?"

"The daughter of M. de Villefort," replied the young wife, "by his first marriage, a fine, well-grown girl."

"But melancholy," interrupted Master Edward, snatching the feathers out of the tail of a splendid paroquet that was screaming on its gilded perch, in order to make a plume for his hat.

Madame de Villefort merely cried, "Silence, Edward!" She then added, "This young madcap is, however, very nearly right, and merely reëchoes what he has heard me say with pain a hundred times, for Mademoiselle de Villefort is, in spite of all we can do to rouse her, of a melancholy disposition and taciturn habit, which frequently injure the effect of her beauty. But what detains her? go, Edward, and see."

"Because they are looking for her where she is not to be found."

"And where are they looking for her?"

"With Grandpapa Noirtier."

"And do you think she is not there?"

"No, no, no, no, no, she is not there!" replied Edward, singing his words.

"And where is she, then? If you know, why don't you tell?"

"She is under the great chestnut-tree," replied the spoiled brat, as he gave, in spite of his mother's cries, live flies to the parrot, who appeared to relish such "small deer" exclusively.

Madame de Villefort stretched out her hand to ring, intending to direct her waiting-maid to the spot where she would find Valentine, when the young lady herself entered the apartment.

She appeared much dejected; and any person who considered her attentively might have observed the traces of recent tears in her eyes.

Valentine, whom we have in the rapid march of our narrative presented to our readers without formally introducing her, was a tall and graceful girl of nineteen years of age, with bright chestnut hair, deep blue eyes, and that languishing air, so full of distinction, which characterized her mother. Her white and slender fingers, her pearly neck, her cheeks tinted with varying hues, gave her, at the first view, the aspect of one of those lovely Englishwomen who have been so poetically compared in their manner to a swan displaying itself.

She entered the apartment, and seeing near her step-mother the stranger of whom she had already heard so much, saluted him without any girlish awkwardness, or even lowering her eyes, and with an elegance that redoubled the count's attention.

He rose to return the salutation.

"Mademoiselle de Villefort, my step-daughter," said Madame de Villefort to Monte-Cristo, leaning back on her sofa and motioning toward Valentine with her hand.

"And M. de Monte-Cristo, King of China, Emperor of Cochin-China," said the young imp, looking slyly toward his sister.

Madame de Villefort at this really did turn pale, and was very nearly angry with this household plague, who answered to the name of Edward; but the count, on the contrary, smiled, and appeared to look at the boy complacently, which caused the maternal heart to bound again with joy and enthusiasm.

"But, madame," replied the count, continuing the conversation, and looking by turns at Madame de Villefort and Valentine, "have I not already had the honor of meeting yourself and mademoiselle before? I could not help thinking so just now; the idea came over my mind, and as mademoiselle entered, the sight of her was an additional ray of light thrown on a confused remembrance; excuse me the remark."

"I do not think it likely, sir; Mademoiselle de Villefort is not very fond of society, and we very seldom go out," said Madame de Villefort.

"Then it was not in society that I met with mademoiselle or yourself, madame, or this charming little merry boy. Besides, the Parisian world is entirely unknown to me, for, as I believe I told you, I have been in Paris but very few days. No,—but, perhaps, you will permit me to call to mind—stay!"

The count placed his hand on his brow as if to collect his thoughts.

"No—it was somewhere—away from here—it was—I do not know—but it appears that this recollection is connected with a lovely sky and some religious *fête;* mademoiselle was holding flowers in her hand, the boy was chasing a beautiful peacock in a garden, and you, madame, were under the trellis of some arbor. Pray, come to my aid, madame; do not these circumstances bring to your mind some reminiscences?"

"No, indeed," replied Madame de Villefort; "and yet it appears to me, sir, that if I had met you anywhere, the recollection of you must have been imprinted on my memory."

"Perhaps M. le Comte saw us in Italy," said Valentine, timidly.

"Yes, in Italy; it was in Italy most probably," replied Monte-Cristo. "You have traveled then in Italy, mademoiselle?"

"Yes; madame and I were there two years ago. The doctors were afraid of my lungs, and prescribed the air of Naples. We went by Bologna, Perugia, and Rome."

"Ah, yes—true! mademoiselle," exclaimed Monte-Cristo, as if this simple indication was sufficient to determine his recollection. "It was at Perugia on the day of the Fête-Dieu in the garden of the Hôtel des Postes, when chance brought us together; you, Madame de Villefort, and her son. I now remember having had the honor of meeting you."

"I perfectly well remember Perugia, sir, and the Hôtel des Postes, and the *fête* to which you allude," said Madame de Villefort, "but in vain do I tax my memory, of whose treachery I am ashamed, for I really do not recall to mind that I ever had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"It is strange, but neither do I recollect meeting with you," observed Valentine, raising her beautiful eyes to the count.

"But I remember it perfectly," interposed the darling Edward.

"I will assist your memory, madame," continued the count; "the day had been burning hot; you were waiting for horses, which were delayed in consequence of the festival. Mademoiselle was walking in the shade of the garden, and your son disappeared in pursuit of the bird."

"And I caught it, mamma; don't you remember?" interposed Edward; "and I pulled three such beautiful feathers out of his tail."

"You, madame, remained under the arbor formed by the vine; do you not remember that whilst you were seated on a stone bench, and whilst, as I told you, Mademoiselle de Villefort and your young son were absent, you conversed for a considerable time with somebody?"

"Yes, in truth, yes," answered Madame de Villefort, turning very red, "I do remember conversing with a man wrapped in a long woolen mantle; he was a medical man, I think."

"Precisely so, madame; this man was myself; for a fortnight I had been at that hotel, during which period I had cured my valet-de-chambre of a fever, and my landlord of the jaundice, so that I really acquired the reputation as a skillful physician. We discoursed a long time, madame, on different subjects,—of Perugino, of Raffaelle, of manners, customs, of the famous *aqua Tofana*, of which they had told you, I think you said, that certain individuals had preserved the secret."

"Yes, true," replied Madame de Villefort, with a kind of uneasiness, "I remember now."

"I do not recollect now all the various subjects of which we discoursed, madame," continued the count, with perfect calmness; "but I perfectly remember that, falling into the error which others had entertained respecting me, you consulted me as to the health of Mademoiselle de Villefort."

"Yes; really, sir, you are in fact a medical man," said Madame de Villefort, "since you have cured the sick."

"Molière or Beaumarchais would reply to you, madame, that it was precisely because I was not, that I had cured my patients; for myself, I am content to say to you that I have studied chemistry and the natural sciences somewhat deeply, but still only as an amateur, you understand." At this moment the clock struck six.

"It is six o'clock," said Madame de Villefort, evidently agitated. "Valentine, will you not go and see if your grandpapa will have his dinner?"

Valentine rose, and saluting the count, left the apartment, without replying a single word.

"Oh, madame!" said the count, when Valentine had left the room, "was it on my account you sent Mademoiselle de Villefort away?"

"By no means," she replied quickly; "but this is the hour when we give to M. Noirtier the sad repast which supports his sad existence. You are aware, sir; of the deplorable condition of my husband's father?"

"Yes, madame, M. de Villefort spoke of it to me—a paralysis, I think."

"Alas, yes! there is an entire want of movement in the frame of the poor old gentleman; the mind alone is still active in this human machine, and that is faint and flickering, like the light of a lamp about to expire. But excuse me, sir, for talking of our domestic misfortunes; I interrupted you at the moment when you were telling me that you were a skillful chemist."

"No, madame, I did not say so much as that," replied the count, with a smile; "quite the contrary. I have studied chemistry because, having determined to live in Eastern climates, I have been desirous of following the example of King Mithridates."

"*Mithridates, rex Ponticus*," said the young scamp, as he tore some beautiful portraits out of a splendid album, "the individual who breakfasted every morning with a cup of poison *à la crême*."

"Edward, you naughty boy!" exclaimed Madame de Villefort, snatching the mutilated book from the urchin's grasp; "you are positively past bearing; you really disturb the conversation; go, leave us, and join your sister Valentine in dear Grandpapa Noirtier's room."

"The album," said Edward.

"What do you mean?—the album!"

"I want the album."

"How dare you tear out the drawings?"

"Oh, it amuses me."

"Go—go directly."

"I won't go unless you give me the album," said the boy, seating himself doggedly in an arm-chair, according to his habit of never giving way.

"Take it, then, and pray disturb us no longer," said Madame de Villefort, giving the album to Edward, who then went toward the door, led by his mother. The count followed her with his eyes.

"Let us see if she shuts the door after him," he muttered.

Madame de Villefort closed the door carefully after the child, the count appearing not to notice her; then casting a scrutinizing glance around the chamber, the young wife returned to her chair, in which she seated herself.

"Allow me to observe, madame," said the count, with that kind tone he could assume so well, "you are really very severe with that dear, clever child."

"Oh, sometimes severity is quite necessary," replied Madame de Villefort, with all a mother's real firmness.

"It was his Cornelius Nepos that Master Edward was repeating when he referred to King Mithridates," continued the count, "and you interrupted him in a quotation which proves that his tutor has by no means neglected him, for your son is really advanced for his years."

"The fact is, M. le Comte," answered the mother, agreeably flattered, "he has great aptitude, and learns all that is set before him He has but one fault,—he is somewhat willful; but really, on referring for the moment to what he said, do you truly believe that Mithridates used these precautions, and that these precautions were efficacious?"

"I think so, madame, because I—I, who now address you, have made use of them, that I might not be poisoned at Naples, at Palermo, and at Smyrna—that is to say, on three several occasions of my life, when, but for these precautions, I must have lost my life."

"And your precautions were successful?"

"Completely so."

"Yes, I remember now your mentioning to me at Perugia something of this sort."

"Indeed! did I?" said the count, with an air of surprise, remarkably well counterfeited; "I really did not remember it."

"I inquired of you if poisons acted equally, and with the same effect, on men of the North as on men of the South; and you answered me that the cold and sluggish habits of the North did not present the same aptitude as the rich and energetic temperaments of the natives of the South."

"And that is the case," observed Monte-Cristo. "I have seen Russians devour, without being visibly inconvenienced, vegetable substances which would infallibly have killed a Neapolitan or an Arab."

"And you really believe the result would be still more sure with us than in the East, and in the midst of our fogs and rains a man would habituate himself more easily than in a warm latitude to this progressive absorption of poison."

"Certainly; it being at the same time perfectly understood that he should have been duly fortified against the poison to which he had not been accustomed."

"Yes, I understand that; and how would you habituate yourself, for instance, or rather, how did you habituate yourself to it?"

"Oh, very easily. Suppose you knew beforehand the poison that would be made use of against you; suppose the poison was, for instance, brucine——"

"Brucine is extracted from the *Brucina ferruginea*, is it not?" inquired Madame de Villefort.

"Precisely, madame," replied Monte-Cristo; "but I perceive I have not much to teach you. Allow me to compliment you on your knowledge; such learning is very rare amongst ladies."

"Oh, I am aware of that," said Madame de Villefort; "but I have a passion for the occult sciences, which speak to the imagination like poetry, and are reducible to figures, like an algebraic equation; but go on, I pray of you; what you say interests me to the greatest degree."

"Well," replied Monte-Cristo, "suppose, then, that this poison was brucine, and you were to take a milligramme the first day, two milligrammes the second day, and so on. Well! at the end of ten days you would have taken a centigramme; at the end of twenty days, increasing another milligramme, you would have taken three hundred centigrammes; that is to say, a dose which you would support without inconvenience, and which would be very dangerous for any other person who

had not taken the same precautions as yourself. Well, then, at the end of a month, when drinking water from the same *carafe*, you would kill the person who had drunk this water as well as yourself, without your perceiving, otherwise than from slight inconvenience, that there was any poisonous substance mingled with this water."

"Do you know any other counter-poisons?"

"I do not."

"I have often read, and read again, the history of Mithridates," said Madame de Villefort, in a tone of reflection, "and had always considered it as a fable."

"No, madame, contrary to most history, it is a truth; but what you tell me, madame, what your require of me, is not the result of a chance question; for two years since you asked me the same questions, and said, too, that for a very long time this history of Mithridates occupied your mind."

"True, sir. The two favorite studies of my youth were botany and mineralogy; and subsequently, when I learned that the use of simples frequently explained the whole history of a people, and the entire life of individuals in the East, as flowers betoken and symbolize a love-affair, I have regretted I was not a man, that I might have been a Flamel, a Fontana, or a Cabanis."

"And the more, madame," said Monte-Cristo, "as the Orientals do not confine themselves, as did Mithridates, to make a cuirass of his poisons, but they also make them a dagger. Science becomes, in their hands, not only a defensive weapon, but still more frequently an offensive one,—the one serves against all their physical sufferings, the other against all their enemies; with opium, with belladonna, with brucea, snake-wood, the cherry-laurel, they put to sleep all those who would arouse them. There is not one of those women, Egyptian, Turk, or Greek, whom here you call 'good women,' who do not know how, by means of chemistry, to stupefy a doctor, and in psychology to amaze a confessor."

"Really!" said Madame de Villefort, whose eyes sparkled with strange fire at this conversation.

"Eh, indeed! Yes, madame," continued Monte-Cristo, "the secret dramas of the East begin and end thus, from the plant which can create love, to the plant that can cause death; from the draught which opens heaven before your eyes, to that which plunges a man in hell! There are as many shades of every kind as there are caprices and peculiarities in human, physical, and moral nature; and I will say further — the art of these chemists knows excellently well how to accommodate and proportion the remedy and the ill to its yearnings of love or its desires for vengeance."

"But, sir," remarked the lady, "these Eastern societies, in the midst of which you have passed a portion of your existence, are as wild and visionary as the tales that come from their strange land. A man can easily be put out of the way there, then; it is, indeed, the Bagdad and Bassora of M. Galland. The sultans and viziers, who rule over such society, and who constitute what in France we call the government, are, in fact, really these Haroun-al-Raschids and Giaffars, who not only pardon a poisoner, but even make him a prime minister, if his crime has been an ingenious one, and who, under such circumstances, have the whole story written in letters of gold, to divert their hours of idleness and *ennui*."

"By no means, madame; the fanciful exists no longer in the East. There are there now, disguised under other names, and concealed under other costumes, agents of police, magistrates, attorney-generals, and bailiffs. They hang, behead, and impale their criminals in the most agreeable possible manner; but some of these, like clever rogues, have contrived to escape human justice, and succeed in their fraudulent enterprises by cunning stratagems. Amongst us a simpleton, possessed by the demon of hate or cupidity, who has an enemy to destroy or some near relation to dispose of, goes straight to the grocer's or druggist's, gives a false name, which leads more easily to his detection than his real one, and purchases, under a pretext that the rats prevent him from sleeping, five or six pennyworth of arsenic — if he is really a cunning fellow, he goes to five or six different druggists or grocers, and thereby becomes only five or six times more easily traced; — then, when he has acquired his specific, he administers duly to his enemy, or near kinsman, a dose of arsenic which would make a mammoth or mastodon burst, and which, without rhyme or reason, makes his victim utter groans which alarm the entire neighborhood. Then arrive a crowd of policemen and constables. They fetch a doctor, who opens the dead body, and collects from the entrails and stomach a quantity of arsenic in a spoon. Next day a hundred newspapers relate the fact, with the names of the victim and the murderer. The same evening the grocer or grocers, druggist or druggists, come and say, 'It was I who sold the arsenic to the gentleman accused.' And rather than not recognize the guilty purchaser, they will recognize twenty. Then the foolish criminal is taken, imprisoned, interrogated, confronted, confounded, condemned and cut off by hemp or steel; or if she be a woman of any consideration, they lock her up for life. This is the way in which you northerns understand chemistry, madame. Desrues was, however, I must confess, more skillful."

"What would you have, sir?" said the lady, laughing; "we do what we can. All the world has not the secret of the Medicis or the Borgias."

"Now," replied the count, shrugging his shoulders, "shall I tell you the cause of all these stupidities? It is because, at your theaters, by what at least I could judge by reading the pieces they play, they see persons swallow the contents of a phial, or suck the button of a ring, and fall dead instantly. Five minutes afterward, the curtain falls and the spectators depart. They are ignorant of the consequences of the murder; they see neither the commissary of police with his badge of office, nor the corporal with his four men; and that is an authority for weak brains to believe that this is the way that things pass. But go a little way from France—go either to Aleppo or Cairo, or only to Naples or Rome, and you will see people passing by you in the streets—people erect, smiling, and fresh-colored, of whom Asmodeus, if you were holding on by the skirt of his mantle, would say, 'That man was poisoned three weeks ago; he will be a dead man in a month.'"

"Then," remarked Madame de Villefort, "they have again discovered the secret of the famous *aqua Tofana* that they said was lost at Perugia."

"Eh, indeed, does mankind ever lose anything? The arts are removed, and make a tour of the world;—things change their names, and the vulgar do not follow them—that is all; but there is always the same result. Poison acts particularly on one organ or the other—one on the stomach, another on the brain, another on the intestines. Well, the poison brings on a cough, the cough an inflammation of the lungs, or some other complaint catalogued in the book of science, which, however, by no means precludes it from being decidedly mortal; and if it were not, would be sure to become so, thanks to the remedies applied by foolish doctors, who are generally bad chemists, and which will act in favor of or against the malady, as you please; and then there is a human being killed according to all the rules of art and skill, and of whom justice learns nothing, as was said by a terrible chemist of my acquaintance, the worthy Abbé Adelmonte of Taormina, in Sicily, who has studied these national phenomena very profoundly."

"It is quite frightful, but deeply interesting," added Madame de Villefort motionless with attention. "I thought, I must confess, that these tales were inventions of the middle ages."

"Yes, no doubt, but improved upon by ours. What is the use of time, encouragements, medals, crosses, Monthyon prizes, and the like, if they do not lead society toward more complete perfection? Yet man will never be perfect until he learns to create and destroy: he does know how to destroy, and that is half-way on the road."

"So," added Madame de Villefort, constantly returning to her object, "the poisons of the Borgias, the Medicis, the Renées, the Ruggieris, and later, probably, that of Baron de Trenck, whose story has been so misused by modern drama and romance —— "

"Were objects of art, madame, and nothing more," replied the count. "Do you suppose that the real *savant* addresses himself stupidly to the mere individual? By no means. Science loves eccentricities, leaps and bounds, trials of strength, fancies, if I may be allowed so to term them. Thus, for instance, the excellent Abbé Adelmonte, of whom I spoke to you just now, made in this way some marvelous experiments."

"Really!"

"Yes; I will mention one to you. He had a remarkably fine garden, full of vegetables, flowers, and fruit. From amongst these vegetables he selected the most simple—a cabbage, for instance. For three days he watered this cabbage with a distillation of arsenic; on the third, the cabbage began to droop and turn yellow. At that moment he cut it. In the eyes of everybody it seemed fit for table, and preserved its wholesome appearance. It was only poisoned to the Abbé Adelmonte. He then took the cabbage to the room where he had rabbits—for the Abbé Adelmonte had a collection of rabbits, cats, and guinea-pigs, equally fine as his collection of vegetables, flowers, and fruit. Well, the Abbé Adelmonte took a rabbit, and made it eat a leaf of the cabbage. The rabbit died. What magistrate would find, or even venture to insinuate, anything against this? What *procureur du roi* has ever ventured to draw up an accusation against M. Magendie or M. Flourens, in consequence of the rabbits, cats, and guinea-pigs they have killed?—not one. So, then, the rabbit dies, and justice takes no notice. This rabbit dead, the Abbé Adelmonte has its entrails taken out by his cook and thrown on the dunghill; on this dunghill was a hen, who, pecking these intestines, was, in her turn, taken ill, and died next day. At the moment when she was struggling in the convulsions of death, a vulture was flying by (there are a good many vultures in Adelmonte's country); this bird darts on the dead bird, and carries it away to a rock, where it dines off its prey. Three days afterward, this poor vulture, who has been very much indisposed since that dinner, feels very giddy, suddenly, whilst flying aloft in the clouds, and falls heavily into a fish pond. The pike, eels, and carp, eat greedily always, as everybody knows—well, they feast on the vulture. Well, suppose the next day, one of these eels, or pike, or carp is served at your table, poisoned as they are to the fourth generation. Well, then, your guest will be poisoned in the fifth generation, and die, at the end of eight or ten days, of pains in the intestines, sickness, or abscess of the pylorus. The doctors open the body and say, with an air of profound learning, 'The subject has died of a tumor on the liver, or of typhoid fever!'"

"But," remarked Madame de Villefort, "all these circumstances which you link thus one to another may be broken by the least accident; the vulture may not pass at the precise moment, or may fall a hundred yards from the fish-pond."

"Ah, this it is which is art. To be a great chemist in the East, we must direct chance; and this is to be achieved."

Madame de Villefort was deep in thought, yet listened attentively.

"But," she exclaimed, suddenly, "arsenic is indelible, indestructible; in what way soever it is absorbed, it will be found again in the body of the creature from the moment when it has been taken in sufficient quantity to cause death."

"Precisely so," cried Monte-Cristo — "precisely so; and this is what I said to my worthy Adelmonte. He reflected, smiled, and replied to me by a Sicilian proverb, which I believe is also a French proverb, 'My son, the world was not made in a day — but in seven. Return on Sunday.' On the Sunday following I did return to him. Instead of having watered his cabbage with arsenic, he had watered it this time with a solution of salts, having their basis in strychnine, *strychos colubrina*, as the learned term it. Now, the cabbage had not the slightest appearance of disease in the world, and the rabbit had not the smallest distrust; yet, five minutes afterward, the rabbit was dead. The fowl pecked at the rabbit, and the next day was a dead hen. This time we were the vultures, so we opened the bird, and this time all particular symptoms had disappeared; there were only general symptoms. There was no peculiar indication in any organ — an excitement of the nervous system — that was it; a case of cerebral congestion — nothing more. The fowl had not been poisoned — she had died of apoplexy. Apoplexy is a rare disease amongst fowls, I believe, but very common amongst men."

Madame de Villefort appeared more and more reflective.

"It is very fortunate," she observed, "that such substances could only be prepared by chemists; for else, really, all the world would be poisoning each other."

"By chemists and persons who have a taste for chemistry," said Monte-Cristo, carelessly.

"And then," said Madame de Villefort, endeavoring by a struggle, and with effort, to get away from her thoughts, "however skillfully it is prepared, crime is always crime; and if it avoid human scrutiny, it does not escape the eye of God. The Orientals are stronger than we are in cases of conscience, and, very prudently, have no hell — that is the point."

"Really, madame, this is a scruple which naturally must occur to a pure mind like yours, but which would easily yield before sound reasoning. The bad side of human thought will always be defined by the paradox of Jean Jacques Rousseau, you know, the mandarin who is killed at five hundred leagues distance by raising the tip of the finger. Man's whole life passes in doing these things, and his intellect is exhausted by reflecting on them. You will find very few persons who will go and brutally thrust a knife in the heart of a fellow-creature, or will administer to him, in order to remove him from the surface of the globe on which we move with life and animation, that quantity of arsenic

of which we just now talked. Such a thing is really out of rule — eccentric or stupid. To attain such a point, the blood must be warmed to thirty-six degrees, the pulse be, at least, at ninety, and the feelings excited beyond the ordinary limit. But if passing, as we do in philology, from the word itself to its softened synonym, you make an elimination — a simple change of words; instead of committing an ignoble assassination, if you merely and simply remove from your path the individual who is in your way, and that without shock or violence, without the display of those sufferings which, becoming a punishment, make a martyr of the victim, and of him who inflicts them a butcher, in every sense of the word; if there be no blood, no groans, no convulsions, and, above all, that horrid and compromising moment of accomplishing the act, then one escapes the clutch of the human law, which says to you, 'Do not disturb society!' This is the mode in which they manage these things, and succeed in Eastern climes, where there are grave and phlegmatic persons who care very little for the questions of time in conjunctures of importance."

"Yet conscience remains!" remarked Madame de Villefort, in an agitated voice, and with a stifled sigh.

"Yes," answered Monte-Cristo, "happily, yes, conscience does remain; and if it did not, how wretched we should be! After every action requiring exertion, it is conscience that saves us, for it supplies us with a thousand good excuses, of which we alone are judges; and these reasons, how excellent soever in producing sleep, would avail us but very little before a tribunal, when we were tried for our lives. Thus Richard III., for instance, was marvelously served by his conscience after the putting away of the two children of Edward IV.; in fact he could say, 'These two children of a cruel and persecuting king, who have inherited the vices of their father, which I alone could perceive in their juvenile propensities — these two children are impediments in my way of promoting the happiness of the English people, whose unhappiness they (the children) would infallibly have caused.' Thus was Lady Macbeth served by her conscience, when she sought to give her son, and not her husband (whatever Shakspere may say), a throne. Ah, maternal love is a great virtue, a powerful motive — so powerful that it excuses a multitude of things, even if, after Duncan's death, Lady Macbeth had been at all pricked by her conscience."

Madame de Villefort listened with avidity to these appalling maxims and horrible paradoxes, delivered by the count with that ironical simplicity which was peculiar to him. After a moment's silence, the lady inquired: "Do you know, M. le Comte, that you are a very terrible reasoner, and that you look at the world through a somewhat distempered medium? Have you really measured the world by scrutinies, or through alembics and crucibles? For, truth to say, you are a great chemist, and the elixir you administered to my son, which recalled him to life almost instantaneously ——"

Madame de Villefort.

"Oh, do not place any reliance on that, madame; *one* drop of that elixir sufficed to recall life to a dying child, but three drops would have impelled the blood into his lungs in such a way as to have produced most violent palpitations; six would have suspended his respirations and caused syncope more serious than that in which he was; ten would have destroyed him. You know, madame, how suddenly I snatched him from those phials which he so imprudently touched?"

"Is it, then, so terrible a poison?"

"Oh, no! In the first place, let us agree that the word poison does not exist, because in medicine use is made of the most violent poisons, which become, according as they are made use of, most salutory remedies."

"What, then, is it?"

"A skillful preparation of my friend's the worthy Abbé Adelmonte, who taught me the use of it."

"Oh," observed Madame de Villefort, "it must be an admirable anti-spasmodic."

"Perfect, madame, as you have seen," replied the count; "and I frequently make use of it — with all possible prudence, though, be it observed," he added, with a smile of intelligence.

"Most assuredly," responded Madame de Villefort, in the same tone. "As for me, so nervous, and so subject to fainting-fits, I should require a Doctor Adelmonte to invent for me some means of breathing freely and tranquilizing my mind, in the fear I have of dying some fine day of suffocation. In the meanwhile, as the thing is difficult to find in France, and your abbé is not probably disposed to make a journey to Paris on my account, I must continue to use the anti-spasmodics of M. Planché; and mint and Hoffman's drops are amongst my favorite remedies. Here are some lozenges which I have made up on purpose; they are compounded doubly strong."

Monte-Cristo opened the tortoise-shell box, which the lady presented to him, and imbibed the odor of the lozenges with the air of an amateur who thoroughly appreciated their composition.

"They are indeed exquisite," he said; "but as they are necessarily submitted to the process of deglutition — a function which it is frequently impossible for a fainting person to accomplish — I prefer my own specific."

"Undoubtedly, and so should I prefer it, after the effects I have seen produced; but of course it is a secret, and I am not so indiscreet as to ask it of you."

"But I," said Monte-Cristo, rising as he spoke — "I am gallant enough to offer it you."

"Oh, sir!"

"Only remember one thing — a small dose is a remedy, a large one is poison. One drop will restore life, as you have witnessed; five or six will inevitably kill, and in a way the more terrible inasmuch as, poured into a glass of wine, it would not in the slightest degree effect its flavor. But I say no more, madame; it is really as if I were advising you."

The clock struck half-past six, and a lady was announced, a friend of Madame de Villefort, who came to dine with her.

"BUT I AM GALLANT ENOUGH TO OFFER IT YOU."

"If I had had the honor of seeing you for the third or fourth time, M. le Comte, instead of only for the second," said Madame de Villefort; "if I had had the honor of being your friend, instead of only having the happiness of lying under an obligation to you, I should insist on detaining you to dinner, and not allow myself to be daunted by a first refusal."

"A thousand thanks, madame," replied Monte-Cristo, "but I have an engagement which I cannot break; I have promised to escort to the Académie a Greek princess of my acquaintance who has never seen your grand opera, and who relies on me to conduct her thither."

"Adieu, then, sir, and do not forget my recipe."

"Ah, in truth, madame, to do that I must forget the hour's conversation I have had with you, which is indeed impossible."

Monte-Cristo bowed, and left the house. Madame de Villefort remained immersed in thought.

"He is a very strange man," she said, "and in my opinion is himself the Adelmonte he talks about."

As to Monte-Cristo, the result had surpassed his utmost expectations.

"Good!" said he, as he went away; "this is a fruitful soil, and I feel certain that the seed sown will not be cast on barren ground."

Next morning, faithful to his promise, he sent the prescription requested.

CHAPTER LIII

"ROBERT LE DIABLE"

THE pretext of an opera engagement was so much the more feasible, as there chanced to be on that very night a more than ordinary attraction at the Académie Royale.

Levasseur, who had been suffering under severe illness, made his reappearance in the character of Bertram, and, as usual, the announcement of the production of the favorite composer had attracted the very *élite* of Parisian fashion. Morcerf, like most other young men of rank and fortune, had his orchestra stall, with the certainty of always finding a seat in at least a dozen of the principal boxes occupied by persons of his acquaintance; he had, moreover, his right of entry into the omnibus-box. Château-Renaud rented a stall beside his own, while Beauchamp, in his editorial capacity, had unlimited range all over the theater.

It happened that on that particular night the minister's box was placed at the disposal of Lucien Debray, who offered it to the Count de Morcerf, who again, upon his rejection of it by Mercédès, sent it to Danglars, with an intimation that he should probably do himself the honor of joining the baroness and her daughter during the evening, in the event of their accepting the box in question. The ladies received the offer with too much pleasure to dream of a refusal. To no class of persons is the presentation of a gratuitous opera-box more acceptable than to the wealthy millionaire.

Danglars had, however, declared that his political principles, as well as being a member of the opposition party, would not permit him to enter the minister's box; the baroness had, therefore, dispatched a note to Lucien Debray, bidding him call for them, it being wholly impossible for her to go alone with her daughter to the opera.

There is no gainsaying the plain fact that a very unfavorable construction would have been put upon the circumstance of two ladies going together, while the addition of a third, in the person of her mother's admitted lover, enabled Mademoiselle Danglars to defy all remarks.

The curtain rose, as usual, to an almost empty house, it being one of the customs of Parisian fashion never to appear at the opera until after the commencement, so that the first act is generally played without the slightest attention being paid to it, that part of the audience already assembled being too much occupied in observing the fresh arrivals,

Comtesse G——.

amidst the noise of opening and shutting doors, and the buzz of conversation.

"Surely," said Albert, as the door of a box on the first circle opened, "that must be the Countess G——."

"And who may she be, pray?" inquired Château-Renaud, carelessly.

"What a question! as if all the world did not know who the Countess G—— was."

"Ah, to be sure!" replied Château-Renaud; "I remember now—your lovely Venetian, is it not?"

"Herself!"

At this moment the countess perceived Albert, and returned his salutation with a graceful smile.

"You are acquainted with her, it seems?" said Château-Renaud.

"Franz introduced me to her at Rome," replied Albert.

"Well, then, will you do as much for me in Paris as he did for you in Rome?"

"With much pleasure."

"Silence!" exclaimed the audience.

This manifestation on the part of the spectators of their wish to enjoy the music, produced not the slightest effect on the two young men, who continued talking.

"The countess was present at the races in the Champ-de-Mars," said Château-Renaud.

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"Bless me! I quite forgot the races. Did you bet?"

"Oh, merely a paltry fifty louis."

"And who was the winner?"

"Nautilus. I betted on him."

"But there were three races, were there not?"

"Yes; there was the prize given by the Jockey Club—a gold cup. you know—and a very singular circumstance occurred about that race."

"What was it?"

"Silence!" again vociferated the music-loving part of the audience.

"Why, that it was gained by a horse and rider utterly unknown on the course."

"Is that possible?"

"True as day. The fact was, nobody had observed a horse entered by the name of Vampa, or that of a jockey styled Job, when, at the last moment, a splendid roan, mounted by a jockey about as big as your fist, presented themselves at the starting-post. They were obliged to stuff at least twenty pounds weight of shot in the small rider's pockets to make him weight; but with all that he outstripped Ariel and Barbare, against whom he ran, by at least three whole lengths."

"And was it not found out at last to whom the horse and jockey belonged?"

"No!"

"You say that the horse was entered under the name of Vampa?"

"Exactly; that was the title."

"Then," answered Albert, "I am better informed than you are, and know who the owner of that horse was!"

"Silence there!" cried the whole collective force of the *parterre.*

And this time the tone in which the command was such that the two young men perceived, for the first time, that the mandate was addressed to them.

They turned for an instant as though demanding some one person who would take upon himself the responsibility of what they deemed excessive impertinence; but as no one responded to the challenge, the friends turned again to the stage.

At this moment the door of the minister's box opened, and Madame Danglars, accompanied by her daughter, entered, escorted by Lucien Debray.

"Ha, ha!" said Château-Renaud, "here come some friends of yours, viscount! What are you looking at there? don't you see they are trying to catch your eye?"

Albert turned round just in time to receive a gracious wave of the fan from Madame la Baronne; as for Mademoiselle Eugénie, she scarcely vouchsafed to turn her large black eyes even to the orchestra.

"I tell you what, my dear fellow," said Château-Renaud, "I cannot imagine what objection you can possibly have to Mademoiselle Danglars — that is, setting aside her inferior rank, which, by the way, I don't think you care very much about. Now, barring all that, I mean to say she is a deuced fine girl."

"Handsome, certainly," replied Albert, "but my taste, I confess, inclines to a softer, gentler, and more feminine style."

"Bless my heart!" exclaimed Château-Renaud, who, because he had seen his thirtieth summer, assumed a paternal air with his more youthful friend; "you young people are never satisfied; why, your parents have chosen you a bride who might serve as the model of the 'Hunting Diana,' and yet you are not content."

"No; I should have liked something more in the manner of the Venus of Milo or Capua; but this chase-loving Diana, continually surrounded by her nymphs, gives me a sort of alarm, lest she should some day entail on me the fate of Actæon."

And, indeed, it required but one glance of Mademoiselle Danglars to comprehend the justness, as well as nature, of Morcerf's remark.

She was certainly handsome, but her beauty was of too marked and decided a character to please a fastidious taste. Her hair was raven black, but amid its natural waves might be seen a species of rebellion to the hand that sought to band and braid it; her eyes, of the same color as her hair, surmounted by well-arched brows, whose great defect, however, consisted in an almost habitual frown, wore an expression of firmness that astonished one in a woman; her nose was precisely what a statuary would have chosen for a Juno. Her mouth, which was too large, displayed teeth of pearly whiteness, rendered still more conspicuous by the over-redness of her lips, contrasting strongly with her naturally pale complexion. Lastly, a dark mole, of much larger dimensions than these freaks of nature generally are, placed just at the corner of her mouth, tended to increase the expression of resolution that alarmed Morcerf.

The rest of Mademoiselle Eugénie's person was in perfect keeping with the head just described; she, indeed, reminded you of the "Hunting Diana," as Château-Renaud observed, but with a more haughty and resolute air.

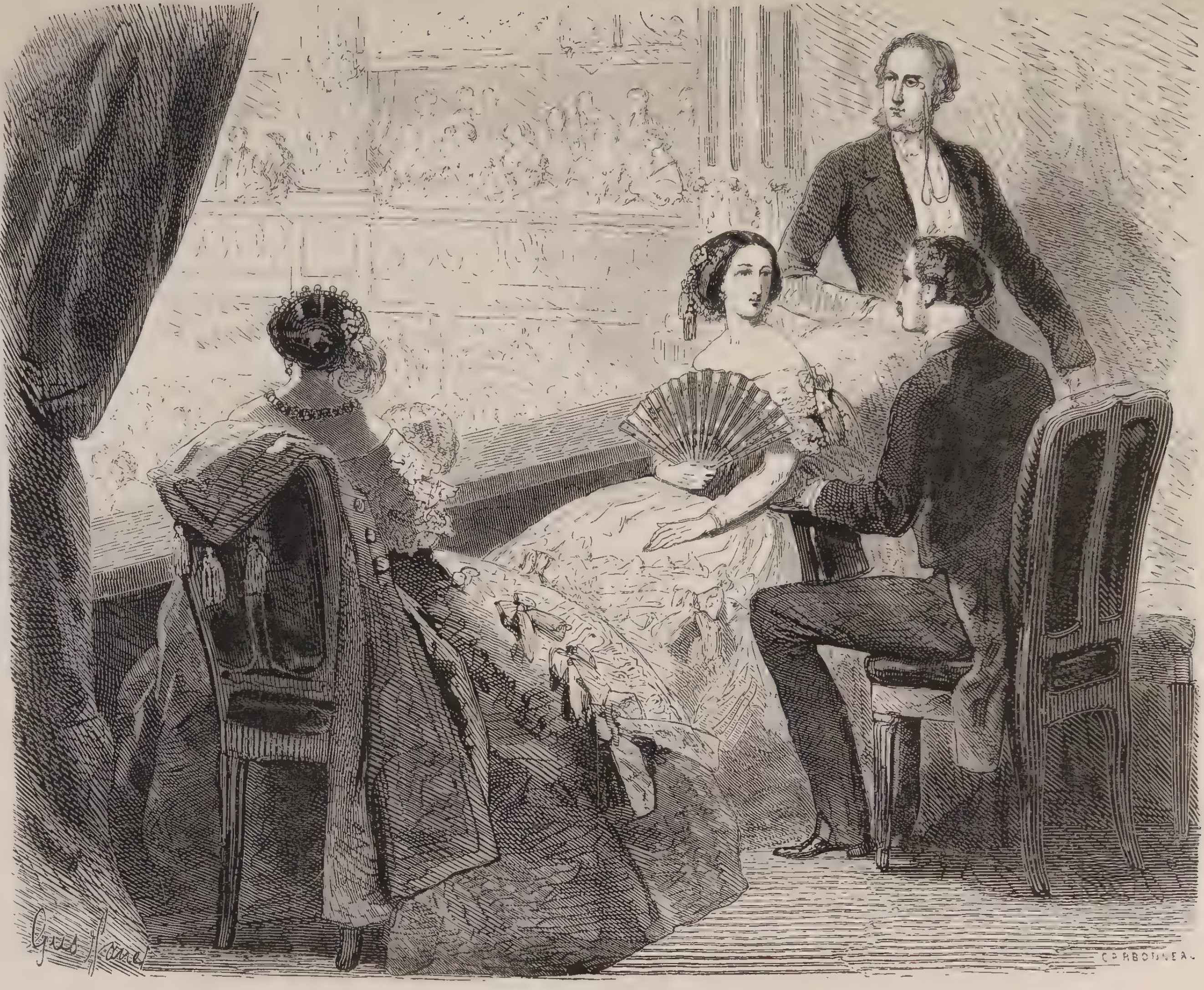
As regarded her attainments, the only fault to be found with them was the same as with her beauty, that they were somewhat masculine. She was a perfect linguist; a first-rate artist; wrote poetry, and composed music. To the study of the latter she professed to be entirely devoted, studying it with a schoolfellow without fortune, but with every talent to become, it was said, an excellent singer.

It was rumored that she was an object of almost paternal interest to one of the principal composers of the day, who excited her to spare no pains in the cultivation of her voice, which might hereafter prove a source of wealth.

The possibility that Louise d'Armilly (this was the name of the young virtuosa) might enter the stage, made Mlle. Danglars, while receiving her at home, refuse to show herself in her company in public. Still, though not received at the Hôtel Danglars in the light of a friend, Louise was treated with far more kindness than is usually bestowed on governesses.

The curtain fell almost immediately after the entrance of Madame Danglars into her box, the orchestra stalls were deserted for the accustomed half-hour's interval allowed between the acts, and the audience were left to promenade the salon, or to pay visits in their boxes.

Morcerf and Château-Renaud were amongst the first to avail themselves of this permission.



"AND THIS WOMAN, MR. MORCERF?"

For an instant the idea struck Madame Danglars that this eagerness on the part of the young viscount arose from his impatience to join her party, and she whispered her expectations to her daughter, that Albert was hurrying to pay his respects to them. Mademoiselle Eugénie, however, merely returned a dissenting movement of the head, while she directed the attention of her mother to an opposite *loge*, situated on the first circle, in which sat the Countess G——, where Morcerf had just made his appearance.

"So we meet again, my traveling friend, do we?" cried the countess, extending her hand to him with all the warmth and cordiality of an old acquaintance; "it was really very good of you to recognize me so quickly, and still more so to bestow your first visit on me."

"Be assured," replied Albert, "that if I had been aware of your arrival in Paris, and had known your address, I should have paid my respects to you long ere this. Allow me to introduce my friend, Baron de Château-Renaud, one of the rare gentlemen now to be found in France, and from whom I have just learned that you were at the races in the Champ-de-Mars, yesterday."

Château-Renaud bowed to the countess.

"Were you at the races, then, M. le Baron?" inquired the countess eagerly.

"I was."

"Well, then," pursued Madame G——, with considerable animation, "you can probably tell me to whom belonged the winner of the Jockey Club stakes?"

"I am sorry to say I cannot," replied the baron; "and I was just asking the same question of my friend Albert."

"Are you very anxious to know, Madame la Comtesse?" asked Albert.

"To know what?"

"The name of the owner of the winning horse?"

"Excessively; only imagine — but do tell me, M. le Vicomte, whether you really are acquainted with it or no?"

"I beg your pardon, madame, but you were about to relate some story, were you not? You said, 'only imagine.'"

"Well, then, listen. You must know I felt so interested for the splendid roan horse, with his elegant little rider, so tastefully dressed in a pink satin jacket and cap, that I could not help praying for their success with as much earnestness as though the half of my fortune were at stake; and when I saw them outstrip all the others, and come to the winning-post in such gallant style, I actually clapped my hands with joy. Imagine my surprise when, upon returning home, I met on the staircase the jockey in the pink jacket! I concluded that, by chance, the owner of the winning horse must live in the same hotel as myself; but, lo! as I entered my apartments I beheld the very gold cup awarded as a prize to the unknown horse and rider. Inside the cup was a small piece of paper, on which were written these words — 'From Lord Ruthven to Countess G——.'"

"Precisely; I was sure of it," said Morcerf.

"Sure of what?"

"That the owner of the horse was Lord Ruthven himself."

"What Lord Ruthven do you mean?"

"Why, our Lord Ruthven."

"The Vampire of the Salle Argentina!"

"Mercy upon me!" exclaimed the countess; "is he here too?"

"To be sure."

"And you visit him?—meet him at your own house and elsewhere?"

"I assure you he is my most intimate friend, and M. de Château-Renaud has also the honor of his acquaintance."

"But what makes you so convinced of his being the winner of the Jockey Club prize?"

"The winning horse entered by the name of Vampa."

"What of that?"

"Why, do you not recollect the name of the celebrated bandit by whom I was made prisoner?"

"True."

"And from whose hands the count extricated me in so wonderful a manner?"

"Yes."

"His name was Vampa; you see it must be the count."

"But what could have been his motive for sending the cup to me?"

"In the first place, because I had spoken much of you to him, as you may believe; and in the second, because he delighted to see a countrywoman take so lively an interest in his success."

"I trust and hope you never repeated to the count all the foolish remarks we used to make about him."

"I should not like to affirm upon oath that I have not. Besides, his presenting you the cup under the name of Lord Ruthven. . . ."

"Oh, but that is dreadful! Why, the man must owe me a fearful grudge."

"Does his conduct seem that of an enemy?"

"No! certainly not!"

"Well, then ——"

"And so he is in Paris?"

"He is."

"And what effect does he produce?"

"Why," said Albert, "certainly, during the first week of his arrival here, he was the great lion of the day; then the coronation of the Queen of England took place, followed almost immediately afterward by the robbery of Mademoiselle Mars' diamonds; and two such events turned attention to other channels."

"My good fellow," said Château-Renaud, "the count is your friend, and you treat him as such. Do not believe what Albert is telling you, Madame la Comtesse; the sensation excited by the appearance of the Count of Monte-Cristo is as strong as ever. His first act was to present a pair of horses, worth thirty-two thousand francs, to Madame Danglars; his second, the preservation of Madame de Villefort's life; now it seems that he has carried off the prize awarded by the Jockey Club! I therefore maintain, in despite of whatever Morcerf may advance, that not only is the count the object of universal remark at this present moment, but also that he will continue to be so while he pleases to exhibit an eccentricity of conduct which, after all, may be his ordinary mode of life."

"Perhaps you are right," said Morcerf; "but, meanwhile, who is the occupant of the Russian Ambassador's box?"

"Which box do you mean?"

"The one between the pillars on the first tier,—it seems to have been fitted up entirely afresh."

"Did you observe any one during the first act?"

"Where?"

"In that box?"

"No!" replied the countess; "it was certainly empty during the first act;" then, resuming the subject of their previous conversation, she said, "And so you believe it was your Count of Monte-Cristo that gained the prize?"

"I am sure of it."

"And who sent the cup to me?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"But I do not know him," said the countess; "I have a strong inclination to return it?"

"Do no such thing, I beg of you; it would only produce a second goblet, formed of a magnificent sapphire, or hollowed out of a gigantic ruby. It is his manner of acting, and you must take him as you find him."

At this moment the bell rang to announce the drawing up of the curtain for the second act. Albert rose to return to his place.

"Shall I see you again?" asked the countess.

"If you will permit me, at the next pause in the opera, I will do myself the honor of coming to inquire whether there is anything in which I can be useful to you in Paris?"

"Pray take notice," said the countess, "that my present residence is 22, Rue de Rivoli, and that I am at home to my friends every Saturday evening."

The young men bowed, and quitted the box. Upon reaching their stalls, they found the whole of the audience in the *parterre* standing up, and directing their gaze toward the box formerly possessed by the ambassador of Russia.

A man of from thirty-five to forty years of age, dressed in deep black, had just entered, accompanied by a lady dressed after the Eastern style; she was young and surpassingly beautiful, while the rich magnificence of her attire drew all eyes upon her.

"By heavens!" said Albert, "it is Monte-Cristo, with his Greek!"

The strangers were, indeed, no other than the count and Haydée. In an instant the lady was the object of the attention, not only of the stalls, but of the whole house; and even ladies leaned forward from the boxes to admire the superb diamonds glittering beneath the rays of the chandeliers.

The second act passed away during one continued buzz of voices—intimating that some great and universally interesting event had occurred; this woman, so young, so fair, so dazzling, was the most remarkable spectacle to be seen.

Upon this occasion a sign from Madame Danglars intimated her desire to see Albert in her box, and the good taste of Morcerf would not permit his neglecting an invitation so unequivocally given. At the close of the act he, therefore, proceeded to the baroness's box.

Having bowed to the two ladies, he extended his hand to Debray. By the baroness he was most graciously welcomed, while Eugénie received him with her accustomed coldness.

"My dear fellow!" said Debray, "you have just come in the very nick of time to help a fellow-creature regularly at a standstill. There is madame overwhelming me with questions respecting the count; she insists upon it that I can tell her where he came from, and whither he is going. Being no Cagliostro, and by way of getting out of the scrape, I said, 'Ask Morcerf; he has got the whole history of Monte-Cristo at his fingers' ends.' Whereupon the baroness made you a sign to come hither."

"Is it not almost incredible," said Madame Danglars, "that a person having at least half a million of secret-service money at his command should possess so little information?"

"Let me assure you, madame," said Lucien, "that had I really the sum you mention at my disposal, I would employ it more profitably than in obtaining particulars respecting the Count of Monte-Cristo, whose only merit in my eyes consists in his being twice as rich as a nabob. However, I have turned the business over to Morcerf, so pray settle it with him. I care nothing more about it."

"I am very sure no nabob would have sent me a pair of horses worth thirty-two thousand francs, wearing on their heads four diamonds valued at five thousand francs each."

"He seems to have a mania for diamonds," said Morcerf, smiling; "and I verily believe that, like Potemkin, he keeps his pockets filled, for the sake of strewing them along the road, as Tom Thumb did his flint stones."

"Perhaps he has discovered some mine," said Madame Danglars. "I suppose you know he has an order for unlimited credit on the baron?"

"I was not aware of it," replied Albert, "but I can readily believe it."

"And, further, that he stated to M. Danglars his intention of staying a year in Paris, during which time he proposed to spend six millions."

"He must be the Shah of Persia, traveling *incog.*"

"Have you remarked the extreme beauty of that young lady, M. Lucien?" inquired Eugénie.

"I really never met with any woman so ready to do justice to another as yourself," continued Lucien, raising his lorgnette to his eye. "A most lovely creature!" cried he.

"Who is this young person, M. Morcerf," inquired Eugénie; "does anybody know?"

"Allow me to state," said Albert, replying to this direct appeal, "I know almost all about the singular person of whom we are now conversing — the girl is a Greek."

"So I should presume by her dress; you tell me no more than what the whole of the spectators know."

"I am extremely sorry you find me so ignorant a cicerone," replied Morcerf, "but I am obliged to confess I have nothing further to communicate — yes, I do know one thing more: she is a musician; for one day that I breakfasted with the count, I heard the sound of a guzla — it is impossible it could have been touched by any other finger than her own."

"Then your count entertains visitors, does he?" asked Madame Danglars.

"In a most noble manner, I can assure you."

"I must persuade M. Danglars to invite him to a ball or dinner, or something of the sort, that he may ask us in return."

"What!" said Debray, laughing; "you would go to his house?"

"Why not? my husband could accompany me."

"But he is a bachelor."

"You have ample proof to the contrary," said the baroness, as she laughingly pointed to the beautiful Greek.

"No, no!" exclaimed Debray; "she is his slave. Do you recollect, Morcerf, his telling us so at your breakfast?"

"Well, then," said the baroness, "she has more the air of a princess."

"Of the Arabian Nights?"

"If you like. What is it that constitutes a princess? Jewels? And she is one blaze of diamonds."

"To me she seems overloaded," observed Eugénie; "she would look far better if she wore fewer, and we should then be able to see her finely-formed throat and wrists."

"See the artist!" exclaimed Madame Danglars; "my poor Eugénie, you must conceal your passion for the fine arts."

"I admire all that is beautiful," returned the young lady.

"What do you think of the count?" inquired Debray; "he is not much amiss, according to my ideas."

"The count?" repeated Eugénie, as though it had not occurred to her to observe him sooner; "the count? oh!—he is dreadfully pale."

"I quite agree with you," said Morcerf; "and it is in that very paleness that consists the secret we want to find out. The Countess G—— insists upon it he is a vampire."

"Then the Countess G—— has returned, has she?" inquired the baroness.

"Is that she, mamma?" asked Eugénie; "almost opposite to us, with that profusion of beautiful light hair?"

"Yes, yes, there she is!" cried Madame Danglars; "shall I tell you what you ought to do, Morcerf?"

"Command me, madame."

"Well, then, you should go and bring your Count of Monte-Cristo to us."

"What for?" asked Eugénie.

"What for? why, to converse with him, of course; have you no curiosity to see him?"

"None whatever," replied Eugénie.

"Strange girl!" murmured the baroness.

"He will very probably come of his own accord," said Morcerf. "There! do you see, madame, he recognizes you, and bows."

The baroness returned the salute in the most smiling and graceful manner.

"Well," said Morcerf, "I may as well be magnanimous, and tear myself away. I will go and try if there are any means of speaking to him."

"Go straight to his box—that will be the simplest plan."

"But I have never been presented."

"Presented to whom?"

"To the beautiful Greek."

"You say she is only a slave?"

"While you assert that she is a princess. No; I hope that when he observes me leave you, he will come and take my place."

"It is probable; therefore, go."

"Adieu! I sacrifice myself, remember that," said Albert, as he made his parting bow.

As he had predicted, just as he was passing the count's box the door opened, and Monte-Cristo came forth. After giving some directions in Arabic to Ali, who stood in the lobby, the count took Albert's arm.

Carefully closing the box-door, Ali placed himself before it, while a crowd of wondering spectators assembled round the Nubian.

"Upon my word," said Monte-Cristo, "Paris is a strange city, and the Parisians a very strange people; really, one might suppose poor Ali was the only Nubian they had ever beheld; now, I will pledge myself that a Frenchman might show himself in public, either in Tunis, Constantinople, Bagdad, or Cairo, without drawing a circle of gazers around him."

"That shows that the Eastern nations have good sense, and look only at what is worth looking at. However, as far as Ali is concerned, I can assure you, the interest he excites is merely from the circumstance of his being your attendant; you, who are, at this moment, the fashionable person."

"Really? and what has procured me so flattering a distinction?"

"What? why, yourself, to be sure! You give away horses worth a thousand louis; you save the lives of ladies of rank; you enter thoroughbred racers under the name of Major Black, with little marmoset jockeys; then, when you have carried off the gold cup, you give it to some handsome woman."

"And who has filled your head with all this nonsense?"

"Why, in the first place, Madame Danglars, who, by the by, is dying to see you in her box, or to have you seen there by others; secondly, Beauchamp's journal; and thirdly, from my own imagination. Why, if you sought concealment, did you call your horse Vampa?"

"That was an oversight, certainly," replied the count; "but tell me, does the Count de Morcerf never visit the opera? I have been looking for him, but without success."

"He will be here to-night."

"In what part of the house?"

"In the baroness's box, I believe."

"Is the charming young person with her her daughter?"

"Yes."

"Indeed? then I congratulate you."

Morcerf smiled.

"We will discuss that subject at length some future time," said he. "But what think you of the music?"

"What music?"

"That which you have just heard."

"Oh, it is admirable as the production of a human composer, sung by a party of bipeds without feathers, as Diogenes styled mankind."

"Why, my dear count, you speak as if you could at pleasure enjoy the seven choirs of paradise?"

"You are right, in some degree; but when I wish to listen to sounds so exquisitely attuned to melody as mortal ear never yet listened to, I go to sleep."

"Then why not indulge yourself at once? Sleep, by all means; for what else was the opera invented?"

"No, thank you. Your orchestra is too noisy. For the sleep I have mentioned, calm and silence are necessary; a certain preparation must also ——"

"I know — the famous hashish!"

"Precisely. My dear viscount, come and sup with me whenever you wish to hear music."

"I have already enjoyed that treat when breakfasting with you," said Morcerf.

"Do you mean at Rome?"

"I do."

"Ah, you heard Haydée's guzla; the poor exile frequently beguiles a weary hour in playing over to me the airs of her native land."

Morcerf did not pursue the subject, and Monte-Cristo himself fell into a reverie.

The bell rang at this moment for the rising of the curtain.

"You will excuse my leaving you," said the count, turning in the direction of his box.

"What! are you going?"

"Pray, say everything that is kind to Countess G—— on the part of her friend the vampire."

"And what to the baroness?"

"That, with her permission, I propose doing myself the honor of paying my respects in the course of the evening."

The third act had now commenced; and during its progress the Count de Morcerf, according to promise, made his appearance in the box of Madame Danglars. The Count de Morcerf was not one of those persons whose aspect would create curiosity in a place of public amusement; his presence, therefore, was wholly unnoticed, save by the occupants of the box in which he had just seated himself.

Monte-Cristo, however, marked his coming, and a slight smile passed over his lips. Haydée, whose soul seemed centered in the business of the stage, like all unsophisticated natures, delighted in whatever addressed itself to the eye or ear.

The third act passed off as usual. Mesdemoiselles Noblet, Julie, and Leroux executed the customary quantity of pirouettes; Robert duly challenged the Prince of Granada; and the royal parent of the Princess Isabella, taking his daughter by the hand, swept round the stage to display his velvet robe.

After which the curtain again fell, and the spectators poured forth from the theater into the lobbies and salon. The count also, quitting his, proceeded at once to the box of Madame Danglars, who could scarcely restrain a cry of mingled pleasure and surprise.

EUGÉNIE DANGLARS.

"Welcome, M. le Comte!" exclaimed she, as he entered. "I have been most anxious to see you, that I might repeat verbally those thanks writing can so ill express."

"Surely so trifling a circumstance cannot deserve remembrance. I had entirely forgotten it."

"But it is not so easy to forget, M. le Comte, that the very day following you saved the life of my dear friend, Madame de Villefort, which I had placed in danger by lending her the same horses."

"This time, at least, I cannot accept of your flattering acknowledgments. Ali, my Nubian slave, had the good fortune of rendering to your friend that eminent assistance."

"Was it Ali," asked the Count de Morcerf, "who rescued my son from the hands of bandits?"

"No, M. le Comte," replied Monte-Cristo, pressing with friendly warmth the hand held out to him by the general; "in this instance I accept your thanks; but you have already tendered them, and fully discharged your debt — and I feel mortified to find you still revert to it. May I beg of you, Madame la Baronne, to honor me with an introduction to your daughter?"

"Oh! you are no stranger — at least not by name," replied Madame Danglars, "and the last two or three days we have really talked of nothing else but yourself. Eugénie," continued the baroness, turning toward her daughter, "M. le Comte de Monte-Cristo."

The count bowed, while Mademoiselle Danglars returned a slight inclination of the head.

"You have a charming young person with you to-night, M. le Comte," said Eugénie. "Your daughter, I presume?"

"No, indeed," said Monte-Cristo, astonished at the coolness and freedom of the question. "She is a poor Greek left under my care."

"And what is her name?"

"Haydée," replied Monte-Cristo.

"A Greek?" murmured Count de Morcerf.

"Yes, indeed, count," said Madame Danglars; "and tell me, did you ever see at the court of Ali Tebelin, whom you so gloriously served, a richer costume than is displayed before us?"

"Did I hear rightly, M. le Comte," said Monte-Cristo, "that you served at Janina?"

"I was inspector-general of the pasha's troops," replied Morcerf; "and I seek not to conceal that I owe my fortune, such as it is, to the liberality of the illustrious Albanese chief."

"But look! pray look," exclaimed Madame Danglars.

"Where?" stammered out Morcerf.

"There, there!" said Monte-Cristo, as, wrapping his arms around the count, he leaned with him over the front of the box, just as Haydée, whose eyes were in search of the count, perceived his pale features close to the countenance of Morcerf, whom he was holding in his arms.

This sight produced on the girl the effect of the head of Medusa. She bent forward as though to assure herself of what she beheld, then uttering a faint cry, threw herself back in her seat. The sound reached the ear of Ali, who instantly opened the box-door.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Eugénie, "what has happened to your ward, M. le Comte? she seems taken suddenly ill!"

"Very probably!" answered the count. "But do not be alarmed on her account! Haydée's nervous system is delicately organized, and she is peculiarly susceptible of odors — nay, there are some which cause her to faint if brought into her presence. However," continued Monte-Cristo, drawing a small phial from his pocket, "I have a remedy."

So saying, he bowed to the baroness and her daughter, exchanged a parting shake of the hand with Debray and the count, and quitted for the box. Upon his return to Haydée, he found her extremely pale. Directly she saw him she seized his hand, while the icy coldness of her own made Monte-Cristo start.

"With whom was my lord conversing a few minutes since?" asked she.

"With the Count de Morcerf," answered Monte-Cristo. "He served your illustrious father, and he owes his fortune to him!"

"Ah, traitor!" exclaimed Haydée; "he it was who sold him to the Turks, and the fortune was the price of his treachery! Knowest thou not that, my dear lord?"

"Something of this I heard in Epirus," said Monte-Cristo; "but the particulars are still unknown to me. You shall relate them to me, my child. They are, no doubt, curious."

"Yes, yes! but let us go hence, I beseech you. I feel as though it would kill me to remain longer near that man."

So saying, Haydée arose, and wrapping herself in her bournous of white cachemire embroidered with pearls and coral, she hastily quitted the box at the moment when the curtain was rising upon the fourth act.

"Do you observe," said the Countess G—— to Albert, who had returned to her side, "that man does nothing like other people? he listens most devoutly to the third act of *Robert le Diable*, and when the fourth begins, he goes away."

CHAPTER LIV

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE STOCKS

SOME days after this meeting, Albert de Morcerf visited the Count of Monte-Cristo at his house in the Champs Elysées, which had already assumed that palace-like appearance which the count's princely fortune enabled him to give even to his most temporary residences. He came to renew the thanks of Madame Danglars, which had been already conveyed to the count through the medium of a letter, signed "Baronne Danglars, née Herminie de Salvieux."

Albert was accompanied by Lucien Debray, who, joining in his friend's conversation, added some passing compliments, the source of which the count's talent for finesse easily enabled him to guess. He was convinced that Lucien's visit to him was to be attributed to a double feeling of curiosity, the larger half of which sentiment emanated from the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin. In short, he supposed Madame Danglars, not being able personally to examine in detail the domestic economy and household arrangements of a man who gave away horses worth thirty thousand francs, and who went to the opera with a Greek slave wearing diamonds to the amount of a million of money, had deputed those eyes, by which she was accustomed to see, to give her a faithful account of the mode of life of this incomprehensible individual.

But the count did not appear to suspect there could be the slightest connection between Lucien's visit and the baronne's curiosity.

"You are in constant communication with the Baron Danglars?" inquired the count of Albert de Morcerf.

"Yes, count, you know what I told you?"

"All remains the same, then, in that quarter?"

"It is more than ever a settled thing," said Lucien. And, considering this remark was all that he was called upon to make, he adjusted the glass to his eye, and biting the top of his gold-headed cane, began to make the tour of the apartment, examining the arms and the pictures.

"Ah!" said Monte-Cristo, "I did not expect the affair would have been so promptly concluded."

"Oh, things take their course without our assistance; whilst we are forgetting them, they are falling into their appointed order; and when, again, our attention is directed to them, we are surprised at the progress they have made toward the proposed end. My father and M. Danglars served together in Spain,—my father in the army and M. Danglars in the commissariat department. It was there that my father, ruined by the revolution, and M. Danglars, who had never possessed any patrimony, both laid the foundations of their different fortunes."

"Yes," said Monte-Cristo, "I think M. Danglars mentioned that in a visit which I paid him; and," continued he, casting a side-glance at Lucien, who was turning over the leaves of an album, "is Mademoiselle Eugénie pretty — for I think I remember that to be her name?"

"Very pretty, or rather, very beautiful," replied Albert, "but of that style of beauty which I do not appreciate; I am an ungrateful fellow."

"You speak as if you were already her husband."

"Ah!" returned Albert, in his turn looking round to see what Lucien was doing.

"Really," said Monte-Cristo, lowering his voice, "you do not appear to me to be very enthusiastic on the subject of this marriage."

"Mademoiselle Danglars is too rich for me," replied Morcerf, "and that frightens me."

"Bah!" exclaimed Monte-Cristo, "that's a fine reason to give. Are you not rich yourself?"

"My father's income is about fifty thousand francs per annum; and he will give me, perhaps, ten or twelve thousand when I marry."

"That, perhaps, might not be considered a large sum, in Paris especially," said the count; "but everything does not depend on wealth, and it is a fine thing to have a good name, and to occupy a high station in society. Your name is celebrated, your position magnificent; and then the Count de Morcerf is a soldier, and it is pleasing to see the integrity of a Bayard united to the poverty of a Duguesclin: disinterestedness is the brightest ray in which a noble sword can shine. As for me, I consider the union with Mademoiselle Danglars a most suitable one; she will enrich you, and you will ennoble her."

Albert shook his head and looked thoughtful.

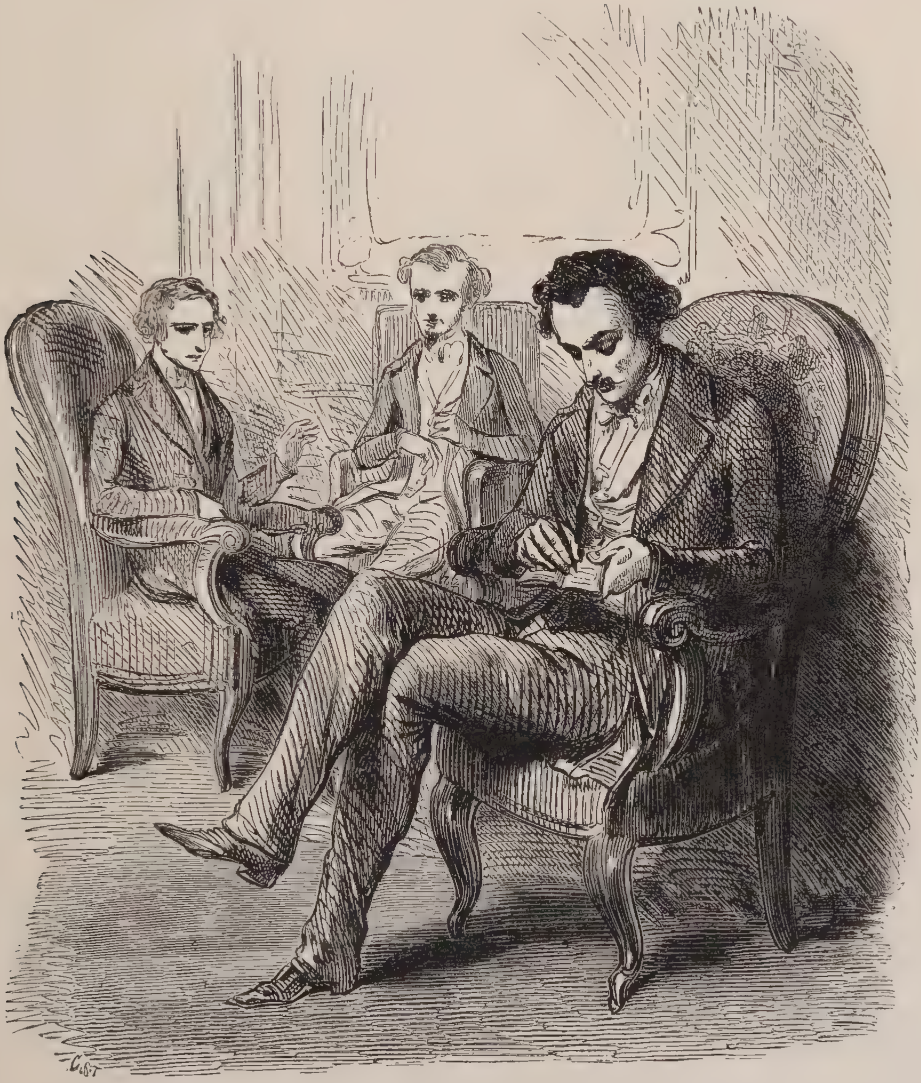
"There is still something else," said he.

"I confess," observed Monte-Cristo, "that I have some difficulty in comprehending your objection to a young lady who is both rich and beautiful."

"Oh!" said Morcerf, "this repugnance, if repugnance it may be called, is not all on my side."

"Whence can it arise then? for you told me your father desired the marriage."

"My mother's is the dissenting voice; she has a clear and penetrating judgment, and does not smile on the proposed union. I cannot account for it, but she seems to entertain some prejudice against the Danglars."



"Ah!" said the count, in a somewhat forced tone, "that may be easily explained; Madame la Comtesse de Morcerf, who is aristocracy and refinement itself, does not relish the idea of being allied by your marriage with one of ignoble birth; that is natural enough."

"I do not know if that is her reason," said Albert; "but one thing I do know, that if this marriage be made, it will render her quite miserable. There was to have been a meeting six weeks ago in order to talk over and settle the affair; but I had such a sudden attack of indisposition ——"

"Real?" interrupted the count, smiling.

"Oh, real enough, anxiety doubtless,—so that they postponed the rendezvous for two months longer. There is no hurry, you know. I am not yet twenty-one, and Eugénie is only seventeen years of age; but the two months expire next week. It must be done. My dear count, you cannot imagine how my mind is harassed. How happy you are in being free!"

"Well! and why should not you be free too? What prevents you from being so?"

"Oh! it will be too great a disappointment to my father if I do not marry Mademoiselle Danglars."

"Marry her, then," said the count, with a significant shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes," replied Morcerf, "but that will plunge my mother into positive grief."

"Then do not marry her," said the count.

"Well, I shall see. I will try and think. You will give me your advice, will you not? and if possible extricate me from my unpleasant position? I think, rather than give pain to my excellent mother, I would run the risk of offending the count."

Monte-Cristo turned away; he seemed moved by this last remark.

"Ah!" said he to Debray, who had thrown himself into an easy-chair at the farthest extremity of the salon, and who held a pencil in his right hand and a note-book in his left, "what are you doing there? are you making a sketch after Poussin?"

"No, no! I am doing something of a very opposite nature to painting. I am engaged with arithmetic."

"Arithmetic!"

"Yes; I am calculating—by the way, Morcerf, that indirectly concerns you—I am calculating what the house of Danglars must have gained by the last rise in Hayti stock; from two hundred and six they have risen to four hundred and nine in three days, and the prudent banker had purchased at two hundred and six; therefore, he must have made three hundred thousand livres."

"That is not his best stroke of policy," said Morcerf; "did he not gain a million from the Spanish bonds?"

"My dear fellow," said Lucien, "here is the Count of Monte-Cristo, who will say to you, as the Italians do:

"'Denaro e santita,
Metà della metà.'

When they tell me such things, I only shrug my shoulders and say nothing."

"But you were speaking of Hayti," said Monte-Cristo.

"Ah, Hayti!—that is quite another thing! Hayti is the écarté of French stock-jobbing. They may like la bouillotte, delight in whist, be enraptured with le boston, and yet grow tired of all; but they always come back to écarté—that is the game *par excellence.* M. Danglars sold yesterday at four hundred and five, and pockets three hundred thousand francs. Had he but waited till to-day, the stocks would have fallen to two hundred and five, and instead of gaining three hundred thousand francs, he would have lost twenty or twenty-five thousand."

"And what has caused the sudden fall from four hundred and nine to two hundred and six?" asked Monte-Cristo. "I am profoundly ignorant of all these stock-jobbing intrigues."

"Because," said Albert, laughing, "one piece of news follows another, and there is often great dissimilarity between them."

"Ah," said the count, "I see that M. Danglars is accustomed to play at gaining or losing three hundred thousand francs in a day; he must be enormously rich?"

"It is not he who plays," exclaimed Lucien, "it is Madame Danglars; she is indeed daring."

"But you who are a reasonable being, Lucien, and who know how little dependence is to be placed on the news, since you are at the fountain-head, surely you ought to prevent it," said Morcerf, with a smile.

"How can I, if her husband fails in controlling her?" asked Lucien; "you know the character of the baronne—no one has any influence with her, and she does precisely what she pleases."

"Ah, if I were in your place——" said Albert.

"Well?"

"I would reform her; it would be rendering a service to her future son-in-law."

"How would you set about it?"

"Ah, that would be easy enough—I would give her a lesson."

"A lesson?"

"Yes. Your position as secretary to the minister renders your authority great on the subject of political news; you never open your mouth but the stock-brokers immediately stenograph your words.

Cause her to lose two or three hundred thousand francs in a short space of time, and that would teach her prudence."

"I do not understand," stammered Lucien.

"It is very clear, nothwithstanding," replied the young man, with a *naïveté* totally free from all affectation; "tell her some fine morning an unheard-of piece of intelligence — some telegraphic dispatch, of which you alone are in possession; for instance, that Henry IV. was seen yesterday at the house of Gabrielle. That will cause the funds to rise; she will lay her plans accordingly, and she will certainly lose when Beauchamp announces the following day, in his gazette, 'The report which has been circulated by some individuals, stating the king to have been seen yesterday at Gabrielle's house, is totally without foundation. We can positively assert that His Majesty did not quit the Pont-Neuf.'"

Lucien half smiled. Monte-Cristo, although apparently indifferent, had not lost one word of this conversation, and his penetrating eye had even read a hidden secret in the embarrassed manner of the secretary. This embarrassment had completely escaped Albert, but it caused Lucien to shorten his visit; he was evidently ill at ease.

The count, in taking leave of him, said something in a low voice, to which he answered:

"Willingly, M. le Comte; I accept your proposal." The count returned to young De Morcerf.

"Do you not think, on reflection," said he to him, "that you have done wrong in thus speaking of your mother-in-law in the presence of M. Debray?"

"M. le Comte," said Morcerf, "I beg of you not to apply that title so prematurely."

"Now, speaking without any exaggeration, is your mother really so very much averse to this marriage?"

"So much so that the baronne very rarely comes to the house, and my mother has not, I think, visited Madame Danglars twice in her whole life."

"Then," said the count, "I am emboldened to speak openly to you. M. Danglars is my banker; M. de Villefort has overwhelmed me with politeness in return for a service which a casual piece of good fortune enabled me to render him. I predict from all this an avalanche of dinners and routs. Now, in order to appear not to expect such a proceeding, and also to be beforehand with them, if you like it, I have thought of inviting M. and Mme. Danglars, and M. and Mme. de Villefort, to my country-house at Auteuil. If I were to invite you and the Count and Countess de Morcerf to this dinner, it would give it the air of a matrimonial rendezvous, or at least Madame de Morcerf would look upon the affair in that light, especially if M. le Baron Danglars did me the honor to bring his daughter. In that case your mother would hold me in aversion, and I do not at all wish that; on the contrary, I desire to occupy a prominent place in her esteem."

"Indeed, count," said Morcerf, "I thank you sincerely for having used so much candor toward me, and I gratefully accept the exclusion which you propose to me. You say you desire my mother's good opinion; I assure you it is already yours to a very unusual extent."

The House at Auteuil.

"Do you think so?" said Monte-Cristo, with interest.

"Oh, I am sure of it; we talked of you an hour after you left us the other day. But to return to what we were saying. If my mother could know of this attention on your part,—and I will venture to tell her,—I am sure that she will be most grateful to you; it is true that my father will be equally angry." The count laughed.

"Well," said he to Morcerf, "but I think your father will not be the only angry one; M. and Mme. Danglars will think me a very ill-mannered person. They know that I am intimate with you—that you are, in fact, one of the oldest of my Parisian acquaintances, and they will not find you at my house; they will certainly ask me why I did not invite you. Be sure to provide yourself with some previous engagement which shall have a semblance of probability, and communicate the fact to me by a line in writing. You know that with bankers nothing but a written document will be valid."

"I will do better than that," said Albert; "my mother is wishing to go to the sea-side—what day is fixed for your dinner?"

"Saturday."

"This is Tuesday—well, to-morrow evening we leave, and the day after we shall be at Tréport. Really, M. le Comte, you are a charming person to set people at their ease."

"Indeed, you give me more credit than I deserve; I only wish to do what will be agreeable to you, that is all."

"When shall you send your invitations?"

"This very day."

"Well, I will immediately call on M. Danglars, and tell him that my mother and myself leave Paris to-morrow. I have not seen you; consequently I know nothing of your dinner."

"How foolish you are! Have you forgotten that M. Debray has just seen you at my house?"

"Ah, true!"

"On the contrary, I have seen you, and invited you without any ceremony, when you instantly answered that it would be impossible for you to be amongst the number of my guests, as you were going to Tréport."

"Well, then, that is settled; but you will come and call on my mother before to-morrow?"

"Before to-morrow?—that will be a difficult matter to arrange; besides, I shall just be in the way of all the preparations for departure."

"You were only a charming man before, but, if you accede to my proposal, you will be adorable."

"What must I do to obtain such a height?"

"You are to-day free as air—come and dine with me; we shall be a small party—only yourself, my mother, and I. You have scarcely seen my mother, you shall have an opportunity of observing her more closely. She is a remarkable woman, and I only regret that there does not exist another who resembles her about twenty years younger; in that case, I assure you, there would very soon be a countess and viscountess de Morcerf. As to my father, you will not see him; he is officially engaged, and dines with M. le Grand Référendaire. We will talk over our travels; and you, who have seen the whole world, will relate your adventures — you shall tell us the history of the beautiful Greek who was with you the other night at the Opera, and whom you call your slave, and yet treat like a princess. We will talk Italian and Spanish. Come, accept my invitation, and my mother will thank you."

"A thousand thanks," said the count; "your invitation is most gracious, and I regret exceedingly that it is not in my power to accept it. I am not so much at liberty as you suppose; on the contrary, I have a most important engagement."

"Ah, take care; you were teaching me just now how, in case of an invitation to dinner, one might creditably make an excuse. I require the proof of a preëngagement. I am not a banker, like M. Danglars, but I am quite as incredulous as he is."

"I am going to give you a proof," replied the count, and he rang the bell.

"Humph!" said Morcerf, "this is the second time you have refused to dine with my mother; it is evident you wish to avoid her."

Monte-Cristo started. "Oh, you do not mean that," said he; "besides, here comes the confirmation of my assertion."

Baptistin entered, and remained standing at the door.

"I had no previous knowledge of your visit, had I?"

"Indeed, you are such an extraordinary person, that I would not answer for it."

"At all events, I could not guess that you would invite me to dinner?"

"Probably not."

"Well, listen; Baptistin, what did I tell you this morning when I called you into my laboratory?"

"To close the door against visitors as soon as the clock struck five," replied the valet.

"What then?"

"Ah, M. le Comte ——" said Albert.

"No, no, I wish to do away with that mysterious reputation that you have given me, my dear viscount; it is tiresome to be always acting Manfred. I wish my life to be free and open. Go on, Baptistin."

"Then to admit no one except M. le Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti and his son."

"You hear: Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti; a man who ranks amongst the most ancient nobility of Italy, whose name Dante has celebrated in the tenth canto of '*L'Inferno*,'—you remember it, do you not? Then there is his son, a charming young man, about your own age, viscount, bearing the same title as yourself, and who is making his *entrée* into the Parisian world, aided by his father's millions. The major will bring his son with him this evening, the *contino*, as we say in Italy; he confides him to my care. If he prove himself worthy, I will push him on; you will assist me, will you not?"

"Most undoubtedly! This Major Cavalcanti is an old friend of yours, then?"

"By no means. He is a perfect nobleman, very polite, modest, and agreeable, such as may be found constantly in Italy, descendants of very ancient families. I have met him several times at Florence, Bologna, and Lucca, and he has now communicated to me the fact of his arrival in this place. The acquaintances one makes in traveling have a sort of claim on one: they everywhere expect to receive the same attention which you once paid them by chance; as though the civilities of a passing hour were likely to awaken any lasting interest in favor of the man in whose society you may happen to be thrown in the course of your journey. This good Major Cavalcanti is come to take a second view of Paris, which he only saw in passing through in the time of the Empire, when he was on his way to be frozen at Moscow. I shall give him a good dinner; he will confide his son to my care; I will promise to watch over him; I shall let him follow in whatever path his folly may lead him, and then I shall have done my part."

"Certainly; I see you are a precious Mentor," said Albert. "Good-bye, we shall return on Sunday. By the way, I have received news of Franz."

"Have you? Is he still amusing himself in Italy?"

"I believe so; however, he regrets your absence extremely. He says you were the sun of Rome, and without you all appears cloudy; I do not know if he does not even go so far as to say that it rains."

"His opinion of me is altered for the better, then?"

"No, he still persists in looking upon you as the most incomprehensible and mysterious of beings."

"He is a charming young man," said Monte-Cristo, "and I felt a lively interest in him the very first evening of my introduction, when I met him in search of a supper, and prevailed upon him to accept a portion of mine. He is, I think, the son of General d'Epinay?"

"He is."

"The same who was so miserably assassinated in 1815?"

"By the Bonapartists."

"Yes! — really I like him extremely; is there not also a matrimonial engagement contemplated for him?"

"Yes, he is to marry Mademoiselle de Villefort."

"Indeed!"

Baptistin.

"And you know I am to marry Mademoiselle Danglars," said Albert, laughing.

"You smile!"

"Yes."

"Why do you do so?"

"I smile because there appears to me to be about as much inclination for the engagement in question as there is for my own. But, really, my dear count, we are talking as much of women as they do of us; it is unpardonable!"

Albert rose.

"Are you going?"

"Really, that is a good idea of yours! — two hours have I been boring you to death with my company, and then you, with the greatest politeness, ask me if I am going. Indeed, count, you are the most polished man in the world! And your servants, too, how very well trained they are; M. Baptistin especially. I could never get such a man as that. My servants seem to imitate those you sometimes see in a play, who, because they have only a word or two to say, always come down to the front to say it. Therefore, if you part with M. Baptistin, give me the refusal of him."

"Agreed, viscount."

"That is not all; give my compliments to your illustrious visitor, Cavalcante of the Cavalcanti; and if by any chance he should be wishing to establish his son, find him a wife very rich, very noble on her mother's side at least, and a baroness in right of her father, I will help you in the search."

"Oh! oh! you will do as much as that, will you?"

"Yes."

"Well, really, nothing is certain in this world."

"Oh! count, what a service you might render me! I should like you a hundred times better if, by your intervention, I could manage to remain a bachelor, even were it only for ten years."

"Nothing is impossible," gravely replied Monte-Cristo; and taking leave of Albert, he returned into the house, and struck the gong three times. Bertuccio appeared.

"M. Bertuccio, you understand that I intend entertaining company on Saturday at Auteuil." Bertuccio slightly started.

"I shall require your services to see that all be properly arranged. It is a beautiful house, or at all events may be made so."

"There must be a good deal done before it can deserve that title, M. le Comte, for the tapestried hangings are very old."

"Let them all be changed, then, with the exception of the sleeping-chamber which is hung with red damask; you will leave that exactly as it is." Bertuccio bowed.

"You will not touch the garden either; as to the yard, you may do what you please with it; I should prefer that being altered beyond all recognition."

"I will do everything in my power to carry out your wishes, M. le Comte. I should be glad, however, to receive your excellency's commands concerning the dinner."

"Really, my dear M. Bertuccio," said the count, "since you have been in Paris, you have become quite nervous, and apparently out of your element; you no longer seem to understand me."

"But surely your excellency will be so good as to inform me whom you are expecting to receive?"

"I do not yet know myself, neither is it necessary that you should do so. 'Lucullus dines with Lucullus,' that is quite sufficient."

Bertuccio bowed, and left the room.

CHAPTER LV

MAJOR CAVALCANTI

BOTH the count and Baptistin had told the truth when they announced to Morcerf the proposed visit of the major, which had served Monte-Cristo as a pretext for declining the invitation which he had received from Albert. Seven o'clock had just struck, and Bertuccio, according to the command which had been given him, had two hours before left for Auteuil, when a *fiacre* stopped at the door of the hotel, and after depositing its occupant at the gate, immediately hurried away, as if ashamed of its employment. The man who alighted from the vehicle was about fifty-two years of age, dressed in one of those green surtouts, ornamented with black frogs, which have so long maintained their popularity all over Europe.

He wore trousers of blue cloth, boots tolerably clean, but not of the brightest polish, and a little too thick in the soles, buckskin gloves, a hat somewhat resembling in shape those usually worn by the gendarmes, and a black cravat striped with white, which, if the proprietor had not worn it of his own free will, might have passed for the neck-ring of a galley slave. Such was the picturesque costume of the person who rang at the gate, and demanded if it was not No. 30 in the Avenue des Champs Elysées that M. le Comte de Monte-Cristo inhabited, and who, being answered by the porter in the affirmative, entered, closed the gate after him, and began to ascend the steps of the house.

The small and angular head of the individual in question, his white hair and thick gray mustache, caused him to be easily recognized by Baptistin, who had received an exact description of the expected visitor, and who was awaiting him in the hall. Therefore, scarcely had the stranger time to pronounce his name before the count was apprised of his arrival. He was ushered into a simple and elegant drawing-room, and the count rose to meet him with a smiling air.

"Ah, my dear sir, you are most welcome; I was expecting you."

"Indeed," said the Italian, "was your excellency then aware of my visit?"

"Yes; I had been told that I should see you to-day at seven o'clock."

"Then you have received full information concerning my arrival?"

"Decidedly."

"Ah, so much the better; I feared this little precaution might have been forgotten."

Major Cavalcanti.

"What precaution?"

"That of informing you beforehand of my coming."

"Oh, no, it has not."

"But you are sure you are not mistaken."

"I am *quite* sure of it."

"It really was I whom your excellency expected at seven o'clock this evening!"

"I will prove it to you beyond a doubt."

"Oh, no, never mind that," said the Italian; "it is not worth the trouble."

"Yes, yes," said Monte-Cristo. His visitor appeared slightly uneasy.

"Let me see," said the count; "are you not M. le Marquis Bartolomeo Cavalcanti?"

"Bartolomeo Cavalcanti," joyfully replied the Italian; "yes, I am really he."

"Ex-major in the Austrian service?"

"Was I a major?" timidly asked the old soldier.

"Yes," said Monte-Cristo, "you were a major; that is the title the French give to the post which you filled in Italy."

"Very good," said the major, "I do not demand more, you understand ——"

"Your visit here to-day is not of your own suggestion, is it?" said Monte-Cristo.

"No, certainly not."

"You were sent by some other person?"

"Yes."

"By the excellent Abbé Busoni?"

"Exactly so," said the delighted major.

"And you have a letter?"

"Yes, there it is."

"Give it to me, then." And Monte-Cristo took the letter, which he opened and read. The major looked at the count with his large staring eyes, and then took a survey of the apartment, but his gaze almost immediately reverted to the proprietor of the room.

"Yes, yes, I see."

"'*Major Cavalcanti, a worthy patrician of Lucca, a descendant of the Cavalcanti of Florence, possessing an income of half a million.*'"

Monte-Cristo raised his eyes from the paper, and bowed.

"Half a million," said he; "magnificent!"

"Half a million, is it?" said the major.

"Yes, in so many words; and it must be so, for the abbé knows correctly the amount of all the largest fortunes in Europe."

"Be it half a million, then; but, on my word of honor, I had no idea that it was so much."

"Because you are robbed by your steward. You must make some reformation in that quarter."

"You have opened my eyes," said the Italian, gravely; "I will show the gentleman the door."

Monte-Cristo resumed the perusal of the letter:

"'*And who only needs one thing more to make him happy.*'"

"Yes, indeed! but one!" said the major, with a sigh.

"'*Which is to recover a lost and adored son.*'"

"A lost and adored son!"

"*Stolen away in his infancy, either by an enemy of his noble family or by the gypsies.*'"

"At the age of five years!" said the major with a deep sigh, and raising his eyes to heaven.

"Unhappy father!" said Monte-Cristo. The count continued:

"'*I have given him renewed life and hope, in the assurance that you have the power of restoring the son whom he has vainly sought for fifteen years.*'"

The major looked at the count with an indescribable expression of anxiety.

"I have the power of so doing," said Monte-Cristo. The major recovered his self-possession.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "the letter was true, then, to the end?"

"Did you doubt it, M. Bartolomeo?"

"No, indeed; certainly not; a good man, a man holding a religious office, as does the Abbé Busoni, could not condescend to deceive or play off a joke; but your excellency has not read all."

"Ah! true!" said Monte-Cristo, "there is a postscript."

"Yes, yes," repeated the major, "yes — there — is — a —postscript."

"'*In order to save Major Cavalcanti the trouble of drawing on his banker, I send him a draft for two thousand francs to defray his traveling expenses, and credit on you for the further sum of forty-eight thousand francs, which you still owe me.*'"

The major awaited the conclusion of the postscript, apparently with great anxiety.

"Very good," said the count.

"He said 'Very good,'" muttered the major. "Then—sir ——" replied he.

"Then what?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"Then the postscript ——"

"Well! what of the postscript?"

"Then the postscript is as favorably received by you as the rest of the letter?"

"Certainly; the Abbé Busoni and myself have a small account open between us. I do not remember if it is exactly forty-eight thousand francs, which I am still owing him; but I dare say we shall not dispute the difference. You attached great importance, then, to this postscript, my dear M. Cavalcanti?"

"I must explain to you," said the major, "that, fully confiding in the signature of the Abbé Busoni, I had not provided myself with any other funds; so that if this resource had failed me, I should have found myself very unpleasantly situated in Paris."

"Is it possible that a man of your standing should be embarrassed anywhere?" said Monte-Cristo.

"Why, really, I know no one," said the major.

"But then you yourself are known to others?"

"Yes, I am known, so that ——"

"Proceed, my dear M. Cavalcanti."

"So that you will remit to me these forty-eight thousand francs?"

"Certainly, at your first request." The major's eyes dilated with pleasant astonishment.

"But sit down," said Monte-Cristo; "really, I do not know what I have been thinking of — I have positively kept you standing for the last quarter of an hour."

"Don't mention it." The major drew an arm-chair toward him, and proceeded to seat himself.

"Now," said the count, "what will you take — a glass of port, sherry, or vin d'Alicante?"

"Vin d'Alicante, if you please; it is my favorite wine."

"I have some which is excellent. You will take a biscuit with it, will you not?"

"Yes, I will take a biscuit, as you are so obliging."

Monte-Cristo rang; Baptistin appeared. The count advanced to meet him.

"Well?" said he, in a low voice.

"The young man is here," said the valet-de-chambre, in the same tone.

"Into what room did you take him?"

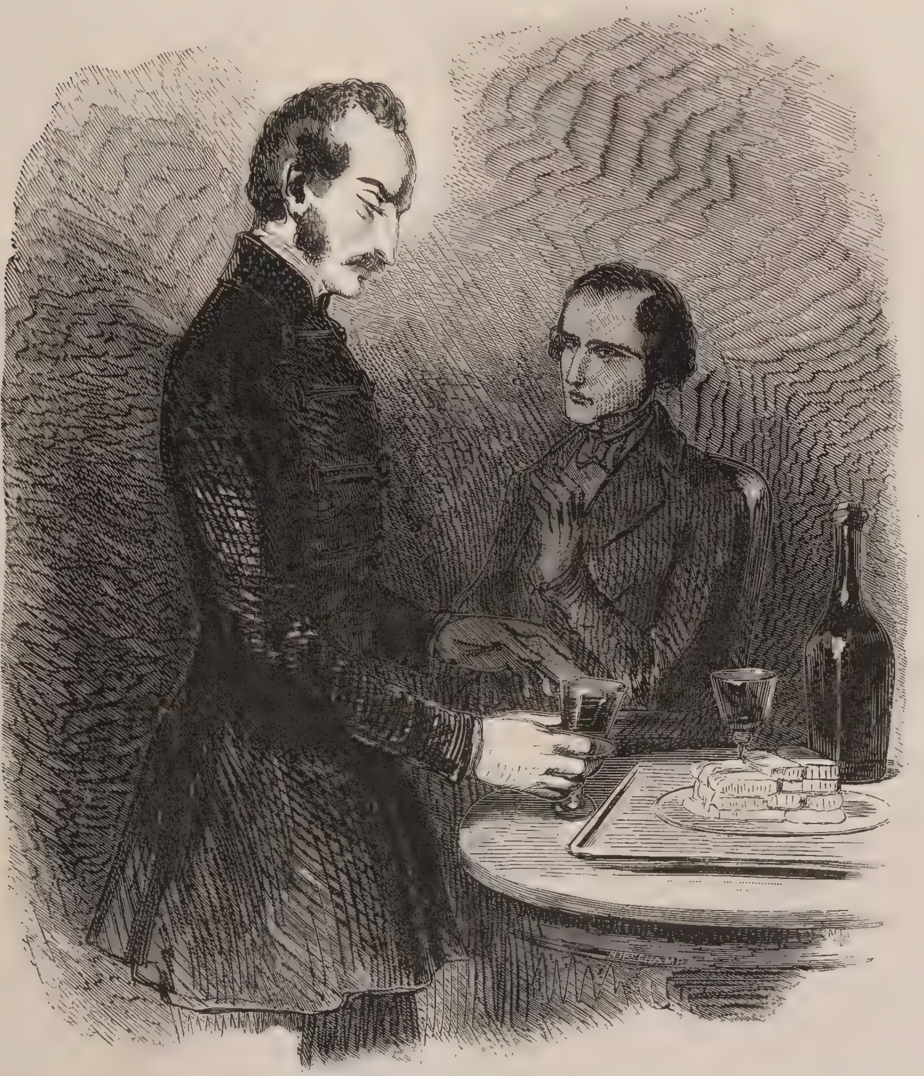
"Into the blue drawing-room, according to your excellency's orders."

"That's right; now bring the vin d'Alicante and some biscuits."

Baptistin left the room.

"Really," said the major, "I am quite ashamed of the trouble I am giving you."

"Pray don't mention such a thing," said the count. Baptistin reëntered with glasses, wine, and biscuits. The count filled one glass, but in the other he only poured a few drops of the ruby-colored liquid. The bottle was covered with spiders' webs, and all the other signs which indicate the age of wine more truly than do wrinkles on the face of a man. The major made a wise choice,—he took the full glass and a biscuit. The count told Baptistin to leave the plate within reach of his guest, who began by sipping the Alicante with an expression of great satisfaction, and then delicately steeped his biscuit in the wine.



"So, sir, you lived in Lucca, did you? You were rich, noble, held in great esteem — had all that could render a man happy?"

"All," said the major, hastily swallowing his biscuit, "positively all."

"And yet there was one thing wanting in order to complete your happiness?"

"Only one thing," said the Italian.

"And that one thing, your lost child!"

"Ah," said the major, taking a second biscuit, "that consummation of my happiness was indeed wanting." The worthy major raised his eyes to heaven and sighed.

"Let me hear, then," said the count, "who this deeply regretted son was; for I always understood you were a bachelor."

"That was the general opinion, sir," said the major, "and I ——"

"Yes," replied the count, "and you confirmed the report. A youthful indiscretion, I suppose, which you were anxious to conceal from the world at large?"

The major recovered himself, and resumed his usual calm manner, at the same time casting his eyes down, either to give himself time to compose his countenance, or to assist his imagination, all the while giving an under-look at the count, the protracted smile on whose lips still announced the same polite curiosity.

"Yes," said the major, "I did wish this fault to be hidden from every eye."

"Not on your own account, surely," replied Monte-Cristo; "for a man is above all these things?"

"Oh, no, certainly not on my own account," said the major, with a smile and a shake of the head.

"But for the sake of the mother?" said the count.

"Yes, for the mother's sake — his poor mother!" cried the major, taking a third biscuit.

"Take some more wine, my dear Cavalcanti," said the count, pouring out for him a second glass of Alicante; "your emotion has quite overcome you."

"His poor mother!" murmured the major, trying if the will was powerful enough to act on the lachrymal gland, so as to moisten the corner of his eye with a false tear.

"She belonged to one of the first families in Italy, I think, did she not?"

"She was of a noble family of Fiesole, M. le Comte."

"And her name was ——"

"Do you desire to know her name ——?"

"Oh," said Monte-Cristo, "it would be quite superfluous for you to tell me, for I already know it."

"M. le Comte knows everything," said the Italian, bowing.

"Oliva Corsinari, was it not?"

"Oliva Corsinari!"

"A marchioness?"

"A marchioness!"

"And you married her at last, notwithstanding the opposition of her family?"

"Yes, I did so."

"And you have doubtless brought all your papers with you?" said Monte-Cristo.

"What papers?"

"The certificate of your marriage with Oliva Corsinari, and the register of your child's birth."

"The register of my child's birth?"

"The register of the birth of Andrea Cavalcanti — of your son; is not his name Andrea?"

"I believe so," said the major.

"What! you are not sure that is his name?"

"I dare not positively assert it, as he has been lost for so long a time."

"Well, then," said Monte-Cristo, "you have all the documents with you?"

"M. le Comte, I regret to say that, not knowing it was necessary to come provided with these papers, I neglected to bring them with me."

"That is unfortunate," returned Monte-Cristo.

"Were they, then, so necessary?"

"They were indispensable."

The major passed his hand across his brow.

"Ah, *per bacco*, indispensable, were they?"

"Certainly they were; supposing there were to be doubts raised as to the validity of your marriage or the legitimacy of your child?"

"True," said the major, "there might be doubts raised."

"In that case your son would be very unpleasantly situated."

"It would be fatal to his interests."

"It might cause him to fail in some desirable matrimonial speculation."

"*O peccato!*"

"You must know that in France they are very particular on these points; it is not sufficient, as in Italy, to go to the priest and say, 'We love each other, and want you to marry us.' Marriage is a civil affair in France, and in order to marry in an orthodox manner, you must have papers which undeniably establish your identity."

"That is the misfortune! You see I have not these necessary papers."

"Fortunately, I have them, though," said Monte-Cristo.

"You?"

"Yes."

"You have them?"

"I have them."

"Ah, indeed!" said the major, who, seeing the object of his journey frustrated by the absence of the papers, feared also that his forgetfulness might give rise to some difficulty concerning the forty-eight thousand francs — "ah, indeed, that is a fortunate circumstance; yes, that really is lucky, for it never occurred to me to bring them."

"I do not at all wonder at it — one cannot think of everything; but, happily, the Abbé Busoni thought for you."

"He is an excellent person!"

"He is extremely prudent and thoughtful."

"He is an admirable man," said the major; "and he sent them to you?"

"Here they are." The major clasped his hands in token of admiration. "You married Oliva Corsinari in the church of San Paolo del Monte-Cattini; here is the priest's certificate."

"Yes, indeed, there it is truly," said the Italian, looking on with astonishment.

"And here is Andrea Cavalcanti's baptismal register, given by the curé of Saravezza."

"All quite correct."

"Take these documents, then; they do not concern me. You will give them to your son, who will, of course, take great care of them."

"I should think so, indeed! If he were to lose them ——"

"Well, and if he were to lose them?" said Monte-Cristo.

"In that case," replied the major, "it would be necessary to write to the curé for duplicates, and it would be some time before they could be obtained."

"It would be a difficult matter to arrange," said Monte-Cristo.

"Almost an impossibility," replied the major.

"I am very glad to see that you understand the value of these papers."

"I regard them as invaluable."

"Now," said Monte-Cristo, "as to the mother of the young man ——"

"As to the mother of the young man ——" repeated the Italian, with anxiety.

"As regards la Marquise Corsinari ——"

"Really," said the major, "difficulties seem to thicken upon us; will she be wanted in any way?"

"No, sir," replied Monte-Cristo; "besides, has she not ——"

"Yes, yes," said the major, "she has ——"

"Paid the last debt of nature?"

"Alas! yes," returned the Italian.

"I knew that," said Monte-Cristo; "she has been dead these ten years."

"And I am still mourning her loss!" exclaimed the major, drawing from his pocket a checked handkerchief, and alternately wiping first the right and then the left eye.

"What would you have?" said Monte-Cristo; "we are all mortal. Now, you understand, my dear M. Cavalcanti, that it is useless for you to tell people in France that you have been separated from your son for fifteen years. Stories of gypsies who steal children are not at all in vogue in this part of the world, and would not be believed. You sent him for his education to a college in one of the provinces, and now you wish him to complete his education in the Parisian world. That is the reason which has induced you to leave Via Reggio, where you have lived since the death of your wife. That will be sufficient."

"You think so?"

"Certainly."

"Very well, then."

"If they should hear of the separation ——"

"Ah, yes; what could I say?"

"That an unfaithful tutor, bought over by the enemies of your family ——"

"By the Corsinari?"

"Precisely. Had stolen this child away, in order that your name might become extinct."

"That will do well, since he is an only son."

"Well, now that all is arranged, do not let these newly awakened remembrances be forgotten. You have doubtless already guessed that I was preparing a surprise for you?"

"An agreeable one?" asked the Italian.

"Ah, I see the eye of a father is no more to be deceived than his heart."

"Hum!" said the major.

"Some one has told you the secret; or, perhaps, you guessed that he was here."

"That who was here?"

"Your child — your son — your Andrea!"

"I did guess it," replied the major, with the greatest *sang-froid* possible. "Then he is here?"

"He is," said Monte-Cristo; "when the valet-de-chambre came in just now, he told me of his arrival."

"Ah, very well, very well!" said the major, clutching the buttons of his coat at each exclamation which he made.

"My dear sir," said Monte-Cristo, "I understand all your emotion; you must have time to recover yourself. I will, in the mean time, go and prepare the young man for this much-desired interview, for I presume that he is not less impatient for it than yourself."

"I should quite imagine that to be the case," said Cavalcanti.

"Well, in a quarter of an hour he shall be with you."

"You will bring him, then? You carry your goodness so far as even to present him to me yourself!"

"No; I do not wish to come between a father and son. Your interview will be private. But do not be uneasy; even if the powerful voice of nature should be silent, you cannot well mistake him; he will enter by this door. He is a fine young man, of fair complexion,— a little too fair, perhaps,— pleasing manners; but you will see and judge for yourself."

"By the way," said the major, "you know I have only the two thousand francs which the Abbé Busoni sent me; this sum I have expended upon traveling expenses, and ——"

"And you want money; that is a matter of course, my dear M. Cavalcanti. Well, here are eight thousand francs on account."

The major's eyes sparkled brilliantly.

"It is forty thousand francs which I now owe you," said Monte-Cristo.

"Does your excellency wish for a receipt?" said the major, at the same time slipping the money into the inner pocket of his coat.

"For what?" said the count.

"I thought you might want it to show the Abbé Busoni."

"Well, when you receive the remaining forty thousand, you shall give me a receipt in full. Between honest men such excessive precaution is, I think, quite unnecessary."

"Yes, so it is, between perfectly upright people."

"One word more," said Monte-Cristo.

"Say on."

"You will permit me to make one remark?"

"Certainly; pray do so."

"Then I should advise you to leave off wearing that style of dress."

"Indeed!" said the major, regarding himself with an air of complete satisfaction.

"Yes. It may be worn at Via Reggio; but that costume, however elegant in itself, has long been out of fashion in Paris."

"That's unfortunate."

"Oh, if you really are attached to your old mode of dress, you can easily resume it when you leave Paris."

"But what shall I wear?"

"What you find in your trunks."

"In my trunks? I have but one portmanteau."

"I dare say you have nothing else with you. What is the use of boring one's self with so many things? Besides, an old soldier always likes to march with as little baggage as possible."

"That is just the case—precisely so."

"But you are a man of foresight and prudence; therefore you sent your luggage on before you. It has arrived at the Hôtel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu. It is there you are to take up your quarters."

"Then, in these trunks ——"

"I presume you have given orders to your valet-de-chambre to put in all you are likely to need,—your plain clothes and your uniform. On grand occasions you must wear your uniform; that will look very well. Do not forget your crosses. They still laugh at them in France, and yet always wear them, for all that."

"Very well! very well!" said the major, who was in ecstasy at the attention paid him by the count.

"Now," said Monte-Cristo, "that you have fortified yourself against all painful excitement, prepare yourself, my dear M. Cavalcanti, to meet your lost Andrea."

Saying which Monte-Cristo bowed, and disappeared behind the tapestry, leaving the major fascinated beyond expression with the delightful reception which the count had given him.

CHAPTER LVI

ANDREA CAVALCANTI

THE Count of Monte-Cristo entered the adjoining room, which Baptistin had designated as the blue drawing-room, and found there a young man, of graceful demeanor and elegant appearance, who had arrived in a *fiacre* about half an hour previously. Baptistin had not found any difficulty in recognizing him. He was certainly the tall young man with light hair, red beard, black eyes, and brilliant complexion, whom his master had so particularly described to him. When the count entered the room the young man was carelessly stretched on a sofa, tapping his boot with the gold-headed cane which he held in his hand. On perceiving the count he rose quickly.

"The Count of Monte-Cristo, I believe," said he.

"Yes, sir, and I think I have the honor of addressing M. le Vicomte Andrea Cavalcanti?"

"Vicomte Andrea Cavalcanti," repeated the young man, accompanying his words with a bow.

"You are charged with a letter of introduction addressed to me, are you not?" said the count.

"I did not mention that, because the signature seemed to me so strange."

"'Sindbad the Sailor,' is it not?"

"Exactly so. Now, as I have never known any Sindbad, with the exception of the one in the 'Arabian Nights' —— "

"Well! it is one of his descendants, and a great friend of mine; he is a very rich Englishman, eccentric almost to insanity; and his real name is Lord Wilmore."

"Ah! indeed! then that explains everything," said Andrea; "that is extraordinary. He is, then, the same Englishman whom I met—at—yes, very well! M. le Comte, I am at your service."

"If what you say be true," replied the count, smiling, "perhaps you will be kind enough to give me some account of yourself and your family?"

"Certainly, I will do so," said the young man, with a quickness which gave proof of his good memory. "I am, as you have said, the Vicomte Andrea Cavalcanti, son of Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, a descendant of the Cavalcanti, whose names are inscribed in the golden book at Florence. Our family, although still rich (for my father's income amounts to half a million), has experienced many misfortunes, and I myself was, at the age of five years, taken away by the treachery of my tutor, so that for fifteen years I have not seen the author of my existence. Since I have arrived at years of discretion and become my own master, I have been constantly seeking him, but all in vain. At length I received this letter from your friend Sindbad, which states that my father is in Paris, and authorizes me to address myself to you for information respecting him."

"Really, all you have related to me is exceedingly interesting," said Monte-Cristo, observing with a gloomy satisfaction this youth, beautiful as a fallen angel, "and you have done well to conform in everything to the wishes of my friend Sindbad; for your father is indeed here, and is seeking you."

The count, from the moment of his first entering the drawing-room, had not once lost sight of the expression of the young man's countenance; he had admired the assurance of his look and the firmness of his voice; but at these words so natural in themselves, "Your father is indeed here, and is seeking you," young Andrea started, and exclaimed:

"My father! is my father here?"

"Most undoubtedly," replied Monte-Cristo; "your father, the Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti." The expression of terror which for the moment had overspread the features of the young man had now disappeared.

"Ah! yes, that is the name, certainly. Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti. And you really mean to say, M. le Comte, that my dear father is here?"

"Yes, sir; and I can even add that I have only just left his company. The history which he related to me of his lost son touched me to the quick; indeed, his griefs, hopes, and fears, on that subject might furnish material for a most touching and pathetic poem. At length, he one day received a letter, stating that the parties who had deprived him of his son now offered to restore him, or at least to give notice where he might be found, on condition of receiving a large sum of money, by way of ransom. Your father did not hesitate an instant, and the sum was sent to the frontier of Piedmont, with a passport signed for Italy. You were in the south of France, I think?"

"Yes," replied Andrea, with an embarrassed air, "I was in the south of France."

"A carriage was to await you at Nice?"

"Precisely so; and it conveyed me from Nice to Genoa, from Genoa to Turin, from Turin to Chambéry, from Chambéry to Pont-de-Beauvoisin, and from Pont-de-Beauvoisin to Paris."

Andrea Cavalcanti.

"Indeed! then your father ought to have met with you on the road, for it is exactly the same route which he himself took, and that is how we have been able to trace your journey to this place."

"But," said Andrea, "if my father had met me, I doubt if he would have recognized me; I must be somewhat altered since he last saw me."

"Oh! the voice of nature," said Monte-Cristo.

"True," interrupted the young man, "I had not looked upon it in that point of view."

"Now," replied Monte-Cristo, "there is only one source of uneasiness left in your father's mind, which is this — he is anxious to know how you have been employed during your long absence from him; how you have been treated by your persecutors; and if they have conducted themselves toward you with all the deference due to your rank. Finally, he is anxious to see if you have been fortunate enough to escape the bad moral influence to which you have been exposed, and which is infinitely more to be dreaded than any physical suffering; he wishes to discover if the fine abilities with which nature had endowed you have been weakened by want of culture; and, in short, whether you consider yourself capable of resuming and retaining in the world the high position to which your rank entitles you."

"Sir," exclaimed the young man quite astounded, "I hope no false report ——"

"As for myself, I first heard you spoken of by my friend Wilmore, the philanthropist. I believe he found you in some unpleasant position, but do not know of what nature, for I did not ask, not being inquisitive. Your misfortunes engaged his sympathies; so you see you must have been interesting. He told me that he was anxious to restore you to the position which you had lost, and that he would seek your father until he found him. He did seek, and has found him, apparently, since he is here now; and, finally, my friend apprised me of your coming, and gave me a few other instructions relative to your future fortune. I am quite aware that my friend Wilmore is an original, but he is sincere, and as rich as a gold mine; consequently he may indulge in eccentricities without any fear of their ruining him, and I have promised to adhere to his instructions. Now, sir, pray do not be offended at the question I am about to put to you, as it comes in the way of my duty as your patron. I would wish to know if the misfortunes which have happened to you — misfortunes entirely beyond your control, and which in no degree diminish my regard for you,— I would wish to know if they have not in some measure contributed to render you a stranger to the world in which your fortune and your name entitle you to make a conspicuous figure?"

"Sir," returned the young man, with a reassurance of manner, "make your mind easy on this score. Those who took me from my father, and who always intended, sooner or later, to sell me again to him, as they have now done, calculated that, in order to make the most of their bargain, it would be politic to leave me in possession of all my personal and hereditary worth, and even to increase the value, if possible. I have, therefore, received a very good education, and have been treated by these kidnappers very much as the slaves were treated in Asia Minor, whose masters made them grammarians, doctors, and philosophers, in order that they might fetch a higher price in the Roman market."

Monte-Cristo smiled with satisfaction; it appeared as if he had not expected so much from M. Andrea Cavalcanti."

"Besides," continued the young man, "if there did appear some defect in education, or offense against the established forms of etiquette, I suppose they would be excused, in consideration of the misfortunes which accompanied my birth, and followed me through my youth."

"Well," said Monte-Cristo, in an indifferent tone, "you will do as you please, viscount, for you are the master of your own actions, and are the person most concerned in the matter; but if I were you, I would not divulge a word of these adventures. Your history is quite a romance, and the world, which delights in romances contained in two covers of yellow paper, strangely mistrusts those which are bound in living parchment, even though they be gilded like yourself. This is the kind of difficulty which I wished to represent to you, M. le Vicomte. You would hardly have recited your touching history than it would go forth to the world, and be deemed unlikely and unnatural. You would be no longer a lost child found, but you would be looked upon as an upstart, who had sprung up like a mushroom in the night. You might excite a little curiosity, but it is not every one who likes to be made the center of observation and the subject of unpleasant remark."

"I agree with you, M. le Comte," said the young man, turning pale, and, in spite of himself, trembling beneath the scrutinizing look of his companion, "such consequences would be extremely unpleasant."

"Nevertheless, you must not exaggerate the evil," said Monte-Cristo, "or by endeavoring to avoid one fault you will fall into another. You must resolve upon one simple and single line of conduct; and for a man of your intelligence, this plan is as easy as it is necessary; you must form honorable friendships, and by that means counteract the prejudice which may attach to the obscurity of your former life." Andrea visibly changed countenance.

"I would offer myself as your surety and friendly adviser," said Monte-Cristo, "did I not possess a moral distrust of my best friends, and a sort of inclination to lead others to doubt them too; therefore, in departing from this rule, I should (as the actors say) be playing a part quite out of my line, and should, therefore, run the risk of being hissed, which would be an act of folly."

"However, M. le Comte," said Andrea, "in consideration of Lord Wilmore, by whom I was recommended to you ——"

"Yes, certainly," interrupted Monte-Cristo; "but Lord Wilmore did not omit to inform me, my dear M. Andrea, that the season of your youth was rather a stormy one. Ah!" said the count, watching Andrea's countenance, "I do not demand any confession from you; it is precisely to avoid that necessity that your father was sent for from Lucca. You shall soon see him; he is a little stiff and pompous in his manner, and he is disfigured by his uniform; but when it becomes known that he is in the Austrian service, all that will be pardoned. We are not generally very severe with the Austrians. In short, you will find your father a very presentable person, I assure you."

"Ah, sir, you have given me confidence; it is so long since we were separated, that I have not the least remembrance of him; and, besides, you know that in the eyes of the world a large fortune covers all defects."

"He is a millionaire — his income is five hundred thousand francs."

"Then," said the young man, with anxiety, "I shall be sure to be placed in an agreeable position."

"One of the most agreeable possible, my dear sir; he will allow you an income of fifty thousand livres per annum during the whole time of your stay in Paris."

"Then in that case I shall always choose to remain there."

"You cannot control circumstances, my dear sir; 'man proposes, and God disposes.'" Andrea sighed.

"But," said he, "so long as I do remain in Paris, and nothing forces me to quit it, do you mean to tell me that I may rely on receiving the sum you just now mentioned to me?"

"You may."

"Shall I receive it from my father?" asked Andrea, with some uneasiness.

"Yes, you will receive it from your father personally, but Lord Wilmore will be the security for the money. He has, at the request of your father, opened an account of five thousand francs a month at M. Danglars', which is one of the safest banks in Paris."

"And does my father mean to remain long in Paris?" asked Andrea.

"Only a few days," replied Monte-Cristo. "His service does not allow him to absent himself more than two or three weeks together."

"Ah! my dear father!" exclaimed Andrea, evidently charmed with the idea of his speedy departure.

"Therefore," said Monte-Cristo, feigning to mistake his meaning—"therefore I will not, for another instant, retard the pleasure of your meeting. Are you prepared to embrace your worthy father?"

"I hope you do not doubt it."

Lord Wilmore.

"Go, then, into the drawing-room, my young friend, where you will find your father awaiting you."

Andrea made a low bow to the count, and entered the adjoining room. Monte-Cristo watched him till he disappeared, and then touched a spring made to look like a picture, which, in sliding partially from the frame, discovered to view a small interstice, which was so cleverly contrived that it revealed all that was passing in the drawing-room now occupied by Cavalcanti and Andrea. The young man closed the door behind him, and advanced toward the major, who had risen when he heard steps approaching.

"Ah! my dear father!" said Andrea, in a loud voice, in order that the count might hear him in the next room, "is it really you?"

"How do you do, my dear son?" said the major gravely.

"After so many years of painful separation," said Andrea, in the same tone of voice, and glancing toward the door, "what a happiness it is to meet again!"

"Indeed it is, after so long a separation."

"Will you not embrace me, sir?" said Andrea.

"If you wish it, my son," said the major. And the two men embraced each other after the fashion of actors on the stage; that is to say, each rested his head on the other's shoulder.

"Then we are once more reunited?" said Andrea.

"Once more!" replied the major.

"Never more to be separated?"

"Why, as to that—I think, my dear son, you must be by this time so accustomed to France as to look upon it almost as a second country."

"The fact is," said the young man, "that I should be exceedingly grieved to leave it."

"As for me, you must know I cannot possibly live out of Lucca; therefore I shall return to Italy as soon as I can."

"But before you leave France, my dear father, I hope you will put me in possession of the documents which will be necessary to prove my descent."

"Certainly, I am come expressly on that account; it has cost me much trouble to find you, but I had resolved on giving them into your hands; and if I had to recommence my search, it would occupy all the few remaining years of my life."

"Where are these papers, then?" said Andrea.

"Here they are."

Andrea seized the certificate of his father's marriage and his own baptismal register, and after having opened them with all the eagerness which might be expected under the circumstances, he read them with a facility which proved that he was accustomed to similar documents, and with an expression which plainly denoted an unusual interest in the contents. When he had perused the documents, an indefinable expression of pleasure lighted up his countenance, and looking at the major with a most peculiar smile, he said, in very excellent Tuscan:

"Then there is no longer any such thing in Italy as the galleys?"

"WILL YOU NOT EMBRACE ME, SIR?" SAID ANDREA.

The major drew himself up to his full height.

"Why? what do you mean?"

"I mean that if there were, it would be impossible to draw up with impunity such deeds as these. In France, my dear sir, for half of this you would be quickly dispatched to Toulon for five years, for change of air."

"Will you be good enough to explain your meaning?" said the major, endeavoring as much as possible to assume an air of the greatest majesty.

"My dear M. Cavalcanti," said Andrea, taking the major by the arm in a confidential manner, "how much are you paid for being my father?"

The major was about to speak, when Andrea continued in a low voice: "Nonsense! I am going to set you an example of confidence; they give me fifty thousand francs a year to be your son; consequently you can understand that it is not at all likely I shall ever deny my parent." The major looked anxiously around him.

"Make yourself easy, we are quite alone," said Andrea; "besides, we are conversing in Italian."

"Well, then," replied the major, "they paid me fifty thousand francs down."

"M. Cavalcanti," said Andrea, "do you believe in fairy-tales?"

"I used not to do so, but I really feel now almost obliged to have faith in them."

"You have, then, been induced to alter your opinion; you have had some proofs of their truth?" The major drew from his pocket a handful of gold.

"Most palpable proofs," said he, "as you may perceive."

"You think, then, that I may rely on the count's promises?"

"Certainly I do."

"You are sure he will keep his word with me?"

"To the letter; but at the same time, remember, we must continue to play our respective parts. I as a tender father ——"

"And I as a dutiful son, as they choose that I shall be descended from you."

"Who do you mean by they?"

"*Ma foi!* I can hardly tell, but I was alluding to those who wrote the letter; you received one, did you not?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"From a certain Abbé Busoni."

"Have you any knowledge of him?"

"No, I have never seen him."

"What did he say in the letter?"

"You will promise not to betray me?"

"Rest assured of that; you well know that our interests are the same."

"Then read for yourself." And the major gave a letter into the young man's hand.

Andrea read in a low voice:

"'*You are poor; a miserable old age awaits you. Would you like to become rich, or at least independent? Set out immediately for Paris, and demand of the Count of Monte-Cristo, Avenue des Champs Elysées, No.* 30, *the son whom you had by the Marquise Corsinari, and who was taken from you at five years of age. This son is named Andrea Cavalcanti. In order that you may not doubt the kind intention of the writer of this letter, you will find inclosed an order for two thousand four hundred francs, payable in Florence, at the house of M. Gozzi; also, a letter of introduction to M. le Comte de Monte-Cristo, on whom I give you a draft of forty-eight thousand francs. Remember to go to the count on the* 26*th of May at seven o'clock in the evening.*

"(*Signed*) 'ABBÉ BUSONI.'"

"It is the same."

"What do you mean?" said the major.

"I was going to say that I received a letter almost to the same effect."

"You?"

"Yes."

"From the Abbé Busoni?"

"No."

"From whom, then?"

"From an Englishman called Lord Wilmore, who takes the name of Sindbad the Sailor."

"And of whom you have no more knowledge than I of the Abbé Busoni?"

"You are mistaken; there I am in advance of you."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Yes, once."

"Where?"

"Ah! that is just what I cannot tell you; if I did, I should make you as wise as myself, which it is not my intention to do."

"And what did the letter contain?"

"Read it."

"'*You are poor, and your future prospects are dark and gloomy. Do you wish for a name? should you like to be rich, and your own master?*'"

"*Ma foi!*" said the young man; "was it possible there could be two answers to such a question?"

"'*Take the post-chaise which you will find waiting at the Porte de Gênes, as you leave Nice; pass through Turin, Chambéry, and Pont-de-Beauvoisin. Go to the Count of Monte-Cristo,* *Avenue des Champs Elysées, on the 26th of May, at seven o'clock in the evening, and demand of him your father. You are the son of the Marquis Cavalcanti and the Marquise Oliva Corsinari. The marquis will give you some papers which will certify this fact, and authorize you to appear under that name in the Parisian world. As to your rank, an annual income of fifty thousand livres will enable you to support it admirably. I inclose a draft for five thousand livres, payable on N. Ferrea, banker at Nice, and also a letter of introduction to the Count of Monte-Cristo, whom I have directed to supply all your wants.*

" 'SINDBAD THE SAILOR.' "

"Humph!" said the major; "very good! You have seen the count, you say?"

"I have only just left him."

"And has he conformed to all which the letter specified?"

"He has."

"Do you understand it?"

"Not in the least."

"There is a dupe somewhere."

"At all events it is neither you nor I."

"Certainly not."

"Well, then ——"

"Why, it does not much concern us; do you think it does?"

"No! I agree with you there; we must play the game to the end, and consent to be blindfold."

"Ah! you shall see; I promise you I will sustain my part to admiration."

"I never once doubted your doing so." Monte-Cristo chose this moment for reëntering the drawing-room. On hearing the sound of his footsteps, the two men threw themselves in each other's arms; and, in the midst of this embrace, the count entered.

"Well, marquis," said Monte-Cristo, "you appear to be in no way disappointed in the son whom your good fortune has restored to you."

"Ah! M. le Comte, I am overwhelmed with delight."

"And what are your feelings?" said Monte-Cristo, turning to the young man.

"As for me, my heart is overflowing with happiness."

"Happy father! happy son!" said the count.

"There is only one thing which grieves me," observed the major, "and that is the necessity there is for my leaving Paris so soon."

"Ah! my dear M. Cavalcanti, I trust you will not leave before I have had the honor of presenting you to some of my friends."

"I am at your service, sir," replied the major.

"Now, sir," said Monte-Cristo, addressing Andrea, "make your confession."

"To whom?"

"Tell M. Cavalcanti something of the state of your finances."

"*Ma foi!* M. le Comte, you have touched upon a tender chord."

"Do you hear what he says, major?"

"Certainly I do."

"But do you understand?"

"I do."

"Your son says he requires money."

"Well! what would you have me do?" said the major.

"You should furnish him with some, of course," replied Monte-Cristo.

"I?"

"Yes, you!" said the count, at the same time advancing toward Andrea, and slipping a packet of bank-notes into the young man's hand.

"What is this?"

"It is from your father."

"From my father?"

"Yes; did you not tell him just now that you wanted money? Well, then, he deputes me to give you this."

"Am I to consider this as part of my income on account?"

"No! it is for the first expenses of your settling in Paris."

"Ah! how good my dear father is!"

"Silence!" said Monte-Cristo; "he does not wish you to know that it comes from him."

"I fully appreciate his delicacy," said Andrea, cramming the notes hastily into his pocket.

"And now, gentlemen, I wish you good-morning," said Monte-Cristo.

"And when shall we have the honor of seeing you again, M. le Comte?" asked Cavalcanti.

"Ah!" said Andrea, "when may we hope for that pleasure?"

"On Saturday, if you will — yes. Let me see — Saturday — I am to dine at my country-house, at Auteuil, on that day, Rue de la Fontaine, No. 28. Several persons are invited, and amongst others, M. Danglars, your banker. I will introduce you to him; for it will be necessary he should know you, as he is to pay your money."

"Full dress?" said the major, half aloud.

"Oh! yes, certainly," said the count; "uniform, cross, knee-breeches!"

"And I?" demanded Andrea.

"Oh! very simply; black trousers, polished boots, white waistcoat, either a black or blue coat, and a long cravat. Go to Blin or Véronique for your dress. Baptistin will tell you where they live, if you do not know where to address them. The less pretension there is in your dress, the better will be the effect, as you are a rich man. If you mean

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to buy any horses, get them of Devedeux; and if you purchase a phaeton, go to Baptiste for it."

"At what hour shall we come?" asked the young man.

"About half-past six."

"We will be with you at that time," said the major. The two Cavalcanti bowed to the count, and left the house. Monte-Cristo went to the window, and saw them crossing the street, arm in arm.

"There go two miscreants!" said he. "It is a pity they are not really related!" Then, after an instant of gloomy reflection,—"Come, I will go to see the Morrels!" said he; "I think that disgust is even more sickening than hatred."

THE TRYSTING PLACE.

CHAPTER LVII

THE TRYSTING PLACE

OUR readers must now allow us to transport them again to the inclosure surrounding Villefort's house, and, behind the gate, half screened from view by the large chestnut-trees, which on all sides spread their luxuriant branches, we shall find some persons of our acquaintance. This time Maximilian was the first to arrive, and to watch for a shadow to appear amongst the trees, and await with anxiety the sound of a light step on the gravel walk.

At length the long-desired sound was heard, and instead of one figure, as he had expected, he perceived that two were approaching him. The delay had been occasioned by a visit from Madame Danglars and Eugénie, which had been prolonged beyond the time at which Valentine was expected. That she might not appear to fail in her promise to Maximilian, she proposed to Mademoiselle Danglars that they should take a walk in the garden, being anxious to show that the delay, which was doubtless a cause of vexation to him, was not occasioned by any neglect on her part. The young man, with the intuitive perception of a lover, quickly understood the circumstances in which she was involuntarily placed, and he was comforted. Besides, although she avoided coming within speaking distance, Valentine arranged so that Maximilian could see her pass and repass; and each time she did so, she managed, unperceived by her companion, to cast an expressive look at the young man, which seemed to say, "Have patience! You see it is not my fault."

Maximilian was patient, and employed himself in mentally contrasting the two girls,—one fair, with soft, languishing eyes, a figure gracefully bending like a weeping-willow; the other a brunette, with a fierce and haughty expression, and as upright as a poplar. It is unnecessary to state that, in the eyes of the young man, Valentine did not suffer by the contrast. In the space of about half an hour the ladies retired, and Maximilian understood that Mademoiselle Danglars' visit had at last come to a conclusion. In a few minutes Valentine reëntered the garden alone. For fear that any one should be observing her return, she walked slowly; and instead of immediately directing her steps toward the gate, she seated herself on a bank, and, carefully casting her eyes around, to convince herself that she was not watched, she presently rose, and proceeded quickly to join Maximilian.

"Good-evening, Valentine," said his well-known voice.

"Good-evening, Maximilian; I know I have kept you waiting, but you saw the cause of my delay."

"Yes, I recognized Mademoiselle Danglars. I was not aware that you were so intimate with her."

"Who told you we were intimate, Maximilian?"

"No one, but you appeared to be so; from the manner in which you walked and talked together, one would have thought you were two school-girls telling your secrets to each other."

"We were having a confidential conversation," returned Valentine; "She was owning to me her repugnance to the marriage with M. de Morcerf; and I, on the other hand, was confessing to her how wretched it made me to think of marrying M. d'Epinay."

"Dear Valentine!"

"That will account to you for the unreserved manner which you observed between me and Eugénie; as in speaking of the man whom I could not love, my thoughts involuntarily reverted to him on whom my affections were fixed."

"Ah, how good you are to say so, Valentine! You possess a quality which can never belong to Mademoiselle Danglars! It has that indefinable charm which is to a woman what perfume is to the flower and flavor to the fruit; for the beauty of either is not the only quality we seek."

"It is your love which makes you look upon everything in that light."

"No, Valentine, I assure you such is not the case. I was observing you both when you were walking in the garden, and, on my honor, without at all wishing to depreciate the beauty of Mademoiselle Danglars, I cannot understand how any man can really love her."

"The fact is, Maximilian, that I was there, and my presence had the effect of rendering you unjust in your comparison."

"No; but tell me—it is a question of simple curiosity, and which was suggested by certain ideas passing in my mind relative to Mademoiselle Danglars ——"

"I dare say it is something disparaging which you are going to say. It only proves how little indulgence we may expect from your sex," interrupted Valentine.

"You cannot, at least, deny that you are very harsh judges of each other."

"If we are so, it is because we generally judge under the influence of excitement. But return to your question."

"Does Mademoiselle Danglars object to this marriage with M. de Morcerf on account of loving another?"

"I told you I was not on terms of strict intimacy with Eugénie."

"Yes, but girls tell each other secrets without being particularly intimate: own, now, that you did question her on the subject. Ah! I see you are smiling."

"If you are already aware of the conversation that passed, the wooden partition which interposed between us and you has proved but a slight security."

"Come, what did she say?"

"She told me that she loved no one," said Valentine; "that she disliked the idea of being married; that she would infinitely prefer leading an independent and unfettered life; and that she almost wished her father might lose his fortune, that she might become an artist, like her friend, Mademoiselle Louise d'Armilly."

"Ah, you see——"

"Well, what does that prove?" asked Valentine.

"Nothing," replied Maximilian.

"Then, why did you smile?"

"Why, you yourself had your eyes fixed on me."

"Do you wish me to go?"

"Ah, no, no! You are the subject on which I would wish to speak."

"True, we must be quick, for we have scarcely ten minutes more to pass together."

"*Ma foi!*" said Maximilian, in consternation.

"Yes, you are right; I am but a poor friend to you. What a life I cause you to lead, poor Maximilian, you who are formed for happiness! I bitterly reproach myself, I assure you."

"Well! what does it signify, Valentine, so long as I am satisfied, and feel that even this long and painful suspense is amply repaid by five minutes of your society, or two words from your mouth? And I have also a deep conviction that heaven would not have created two hearts, harmonizing as ours do, and restored us to each other, almost miraculously, at last to separate us."

"Thank you, for your kind and cheering words. You must hope for us both, Maximilian."

"But why must you leave me so soon?"

"I do not know. Madame de Villefort sent to request my presence, as she had a communication to make on which a part of my fortune depended. Let them take my fortune, I am already too rich; and, perhaps, when they have taken it, they will leave me in peace and quietness. You would love me as much if I were poor, would you not Maximilian?"

"Oh! I shall always love you. What should I care for either riches or poverty, if my Valentine was near me, and I felt certain that no one could deprive me of her? But do you not fear that this communication may relate to your marriage?"

"I do not think that is the case?"

"However it may be, Valentine, I protest to you, that I will never love another!"

"And do you think it makes me happy to hear such a protestation?"

"Pardon me, I did not mean to grieve you."

"But I was going to tell you that I met M. de Morcerf the other day."

"Well?"

"Monsieur Franz is his friend, you know."

"What then?"

"M. de Morcerf has received a letter from Franz, announcing his immediate return." Valentine turned pale, and leaned against the gate for support.

"Can it really be true, and is that why Madame de Villefort has sent for me? No, that cannot be the case, for the communication would not be likely to come through her instrumentality."

"Why not?"

"Because — I scarcely know why — but it has appeared as if Madame de Villefort secretly objected to the marriage, although she did not choose openly to oppose it."

"Is it so? Then I feel as if I could adore Madame de Villefort."

"Do not be in such a hurry to do that," said Valentine, with a sad smile.

"If she objects to your marrying M. d'Epinay, she would be all the more likely to listen to any other proposition."

"No, Maximilian, it is not suitors to which Madame de Villefort objects; it is marriage itself."

"Marriage! if she dislikes that so much, why did she ever marry herself?"

"You do not understand me, Maximilian. About a year ago I talked of retiring to a convent: Madame de Villefort, inspite of all the remarks which she considered it her duty to make, secretly approved of the proposition; my father consented to it, at her instigation, and it was only on account of my poor grandfather that I finally abandoned the project. You can form no idea of the expression of that old man's eye when he looks at me, the only person in the world whom he loves, and, I had almost said, by whom he is beloved in return. When he learned my resolution, I shall never forget the reproachful look which he cast on me, and the tears of utter despair which chased each other down his lifeless cheeks. Ah, Maximilian, I experienced, at that moment, such remorse for my intention, that, throwing myself at his feet, I exclaimed,—'Forgive me, pray forgive me, my dear grandfather; they may do what they will with me, I will never leave you.' When I had ceased speaking, he thankfully raised his eyes to heaven, but without uttering a word. Ah, Maximilian! I may have much to suffer, but I feel as if my grandfather's look at that moment would more than compensate for all."

"Dear Valentine, you are a perfect angel; and I am sure I do not know what I can have done to merit your being revealed to me. But tell me, what interest Madame de Villefort can have in your remaining unmarried?"

"Did I not tell you just now that I was rich, Maximilian — too rich? I possess nearly fifty thousand livres in right of my mother; my grandfather and my grandmother, the Marquis and Marquise de St. Méran, will leave me as much more; and M. Noirtier evidently intends making me his heir. My brother Edward, who inherits nothing from his mother, will, therefore, be poor in comparison with me. Now, if I had taken the veil, all this fortune would have descended to my father, and, in reversion, to his son."

"Ah! how strange it seems that such a young and beautiful woman should be so avaricious."

"It is not for herself that she is so, but for her son; and what you regard as a vice becomes almost a virtue when looked at in the light of maternal love."

"But could you not compromise matters, and give up a portion of your fortune to her son?"

"How could I make such a proposition, especially to a woman who always professes to be so entirely disenterested?"

"Valentine, I have always regarded our love in the light of something sacred; consequently, I have covered it with the veil of respect, and hid it in the inmost recesses of my soul; no human being, not even my sister, is aware of its existence. Valentine, will you permit me to make a confidant of a friend, and reveal to him the love I bear you?"

Valentine started. "A friend, Maximilian; and who is this friend? I tremble to give my permission."

"Listen, Valentine. Have you never experienced for any one that sudden and irresistible sympathy which made you feel as if the object of it had been your old and familiar friend, though, in reality, it was the first time you had ever met? Nay, further, have you never endeavored to recall the time, place, and circumstances of your former intercourse; and failing in this attempt, have almost believed that your spirits must have held converse with each other in some state of being anterior to the present, and that you are only now occupied in a reminiscence of the past?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is precisely the feeling which I experienced when I first saw that extraordinary man."

"Extraordinary, did you say?"

"Yes."

"You have known him for some time, then?"

"Scarcely longer than eight or ten days."

"And do you call a man your friend whom you have only known for eight or ten days? Ah, Maximilian, I had hoped you set a higher value on the title of friend?"

"Your logic is most powerful, Valentine; but say what you will, I can never renounce the sentiment which has instinctively taken possession of my mind. I feel as if this man should be associated with all the good in the future, which it really seems as if his eye was able to see, and his hand to direct."

"He must be a prophet, then," said Valentine, smiling.

"Indeed!" said Maximilian, "I have often been tempted to think he divines, especially future good."

"Ah!" said Valentine, in a mournful tone, "do let me see this man, Maximilian; he may tell me whether I shall ever be loved sufficiently to make amends for all I have suffered."

"My poor girl, you know him already."

"I know him?"

"Yes; it was he who saved the life of your step-mother and her son."

"The Count of Monte-Cristo?"

"The same."

"Ah!" cried Valentine, "he is too much the friend of Madame de Villefort ever to be mine."

"The friend of Madame de Villefort! It cannot be; surely, Valentine, you are mistaken?"

"No, indeed, I am not. It is no longer Edward, but the count who rules our household. Courted by my step-mother, who regards him as the epitome of human wisdom; admired by my father, who says he has never before heard such sublime ideas so eloquently expressed; idolized by Edward, who, notwithstanding his fear of the count's large black eyes, runs to meet him the moment he arrives, and opens his hand, in which he is sure to find some delightful present—M. de Monte-Cristo is quite at home."

"If such be the case, my dear Valentine, you must yourself have felt, or at all events will soon feel, the effects of his presence. He meets Albert de Morcerf in Italy—it is to rescue him from the hands of the banditti; he introduces himself to Madame Danglars—it is that he may give her a royal present; your step-mother and her son pass before his door—it is that his Nubian may save them from destruction. This man evidently possesses the power of influencing events. I never saw more simple tastes united to greater magnificence. His smile is so sweet when he addresses me, that I forget it can ever be bitter to others. Ah! Valentine, tell me, if he ever looked on you with one of those sweet smiles? if so, depend on it, you will be happy."

"Me!" said the young girl, "he never even glances at me; on the contrary, if I accidentally cross his path, he appears rather to avoid me. Ah, he is not generous, neither does he possess that supernatural penetration which you attribute to him; for if he had, he would have perceived that I was unhappy; and if he had been generous, seeing me sad and solitary, he would have used his influence to my advantage; and since, as you say, he resembles the sun, he would have warmed my heart with one of his life-giving rays. You say he loves you, Maximilian; how do you know that he does? All would pay deference to an officer like you, with a fierce mustache and a long saber; but they think they may crush a poor weeping girl with impunity."

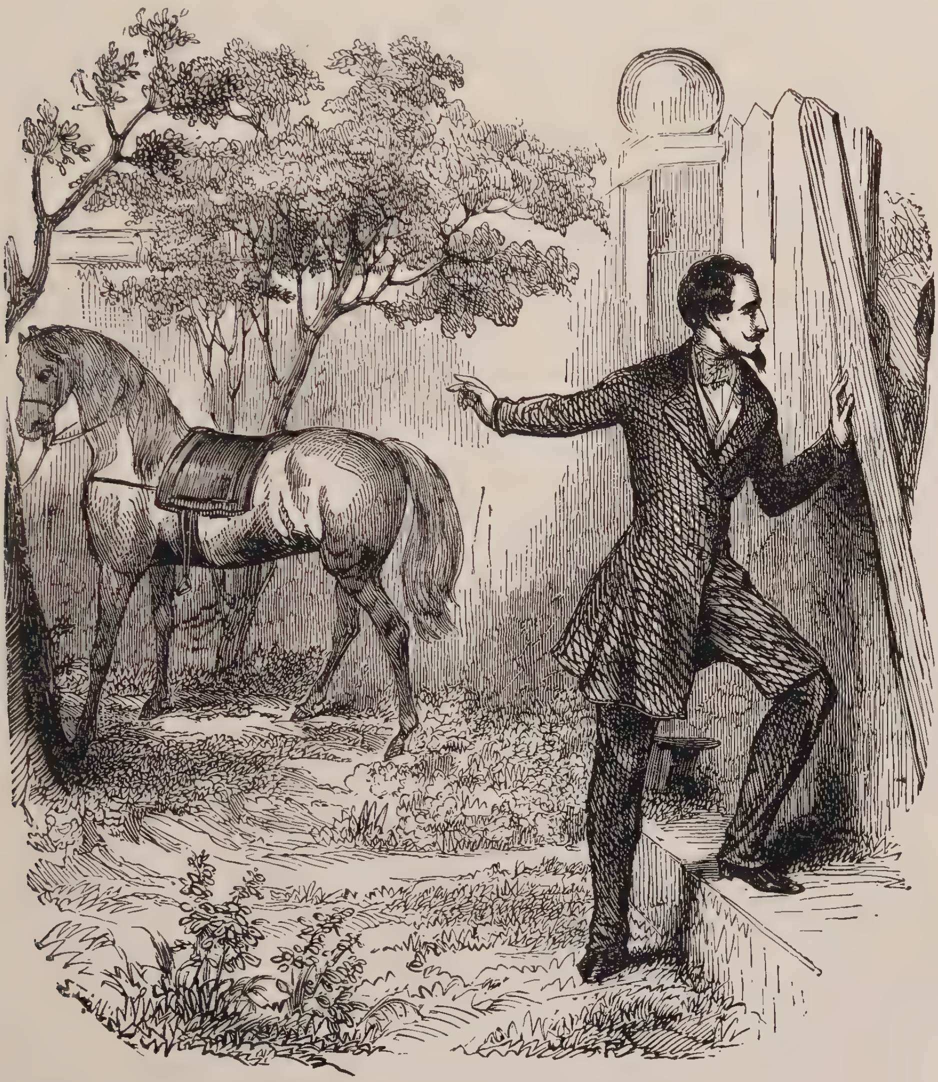
"Ah, Valentine! I assure you you are mistaken."

"If it were otherwise, if he treated me diplomatically,—that is to say, like a man who wishes, by some means or other, to obtain a footing in the house, so that he may ultimately gain the power of dictating to its occupants,—he would, if it had been but once, have honored me with the smile which you extol so loudly; but no, he saw that I was unhappy, he understood that I could be of no use to him, and therefore paid me no regard whatever. Who knows but that, in order to please Madame de Villefort and my father, he may not persecute me by every means in his power? It is not just that he should despise me thus, without any reason for so doing. Ah! forgive me," said Valentine, perceiving the effect which her words were producing on Maximilian; "I have done wrong, for I have given utterance to thoughts concerning that man which I did not even know existed in my heart. I do not deny the influence of which you speak, or that I have not myself experienced it; but with me it has been productive of evil rather than good."

"Well, Valentine," said Morrel, with a sigh, "we will not discuss the matter further. I will not make a confidant of him."

"Alas!" said Valentine, "I see that I have given you pain. I can only say how sincerely I ask pardon for having grieved you. But, indeed, I am not prejudiced beyond the power of conviction. Tell me what this count of Monte-Cristo has done for you?"

"I own that your question embarrasses me, Valentine, for I cannot say that the count has rendered me any ostensible service. Still, as I have already told you, I have an instinctive affection for him, the source of which I cannot explain to you. Has the sun done anything for me?



No; he warms me with his rays, and it is by his light that I see you—nothing more. Has such and such a perfume done anything for me? No; its odor charms one of my senses—that is all I can say when I am asked why I praise it. My friendship for him is as strange and unaccountable as his for me. A secret voice seems to whisper to me that there must be something more than chance in this unexpected reciprocity of friendship. In his most simple actions, as well as in his most secret thoughts, I find a relation to my own. You will perhaps smile at me when I tell you that, ever since I have known this man, I have involuntarily entertained the idea that all the good fortune which has befallen me originated from him. However, I have managed to live thirty years without this protection, you will say; but I will endeavor a little to illustrate my meaning. He invited me to dine with him on Saturday, which was a very natural thing for him to do. Well, what have I learned since? That your mother and M. de Villefort are both coming to this dinner. I shall meet them there, and who knows what may result from the interview? This may appear to you to be no unusual combination of circumstances; nevertheless, I perceive in it something more than is apparent. I believe that this singular man, who divines everything, has arranged for me to meet M. and Mme. de Villefort; and sometimes, I confess, I try to read in his eyes whether he has divined our love."

"My good friend," said Valentine, "I should take you for a visionary, and should tremble for your reason, if I were always to hear you talk in a strain similar to this. Is it possible that you can see anything more than the merest chance in this meeting? Pray reflect a little. My father, who never goes out, has several times been on the point of refusing this invitation; Madame de Villefort, on the contrary, is burning with the desire of seeing this extraordinary nabob in his own house; therefore, she has with great difficulty prevailed on my father to accompany her. No, no! it is as I have said, Maximilian; there is no one in the world of whom I can ask help but yourself and my grandfather, who is little better than a corpse—no support to cling to but my mother in heaven!"

"I see that you are right, logically speaking," said Maximilian; "but the gentle voice which usually has such power over me fails to convince me to-day."

"I feel the same as regards yourself," said Valentine; "and I own that, if you have no stronger proof to give me——"

"I have another," replied Maximilian; "but I fear you will deem it even more absurd than the first."

"So much the worse," said Valentine, smiling.

"It is, nevertheless, conclusive to my mind. In my ten years of service I have several times owed my life to one of those mysterious impulses which directed me to move at once either to the right or to the left, in order to escape the ball which would have killed me."

"Dear Maximilian, why not attribute your escape to my constant prayers for your safety? When you are away, I no longer pray for myself, but for you."

"Yes, since you have known me," said Morrel, smiling; "but that cannot apply to the time previous to our acquaintance, Valentine."

"You are very provoking, and will not give me credit for anything; but let me hear this second example, which you yourself own to be absurd."

"Well, look through this opening, and you will see the beautiful new horse which I rode here."

"Ah! what a beautiful creature!" cried Valentine; "why did you not bring it close to the gate, that I might talk to it and pat it?"

"It is, as you say, a very valuable animal," said Maximilian. "You know that my means are limited, and that I am what would be designated a man of moderate pretensions. Well, I went to a horse-dealer's, where I saw this magnificent horse, which I have named Médéah. I asked the price of it; they told me it was four thousand five hundred francs. I was, therefore, obliged to give it up, as you may imagine; but I went away with rather a heavy heart, for the horse had looked at me affectionately, had rubbed its head against me, and, when I mounted it, had pranced in the most coquettish way imaginable, so that I was altogether fascinated with it. The same evening some friends of mine visited me, M. de Château-Renaud, M. Debray, and five or six other choice spirits, whom you do not know, even by name. They proposed *la bouillotte.* I never play, for I am not rich enough to afford to lose, nor sufficiently poor to desire to gain. But I was at my own house, you understand, so there was nothing to be done but to send for the cards, which I did. Just as they were sitting down to table, M. de Monte-Cristo arrived. He took his seat amongst them; they played, and I won. I am almost ashamed to say that my gains amounted to five thousand francs. We separated at midnight. I could not defer my pleasure, so I took a cabriolet and drove to the horse-dealer's. Feverish and excited, I rang at the door. The person who opened it must have taken me for a madman, for I rushed at once for the stable. Médéah was standing at the rack, eating her hay. I immediately put on the saddle and bridle, to which operation she lent herself with the best grace possible; then putting the four thousand five hundred francs into the hands of the astonished dealer, I proceeded to fulfill my intention of passing the night in riding in the Champs Elysées. As I rode by the count's house I perceived a light in one of the windows, and fancied I saw the shadow of his figure moving behind the curtain. Now, Valentine, I firmly believe that he knew of my wish to possess this horse, and that he lost expressly to give me the means of procuring it."

"My dear Maximilian, you are really too fanciful; you will not love me long. A man who accustoms himself to live in such a world of poetry must find little excitement in an every-day attachment such as ours. But they are calling me. Do you hear?"

"Ah, Valentine!" said Maximilian, "give me but one finger through this opening in the grating, that I may have the happiness of kissing it."

"Maximilian, we said we would be to each other as two voices, two shadows."

"As you will, Valentine."

"Shall you be happy if I do what you wish?"

"Oh, yes!"

Valentine mounted the bank, and passed not only her finger but her whole hand through the opening. Maximilian uttered a cry of delight, and, springing forward, seized the hand extended toward him, and imprinted on it a fervent and impassioned kiss. The little hand was then immediately withdrawn, and the young man saw Valentine hurrying toward the house, as though she were almost terrified at her own sensations.

CHAPTER LVIII

M. NOIRTIER DE VILLEFORT

WE will now relate what was passing in the house of the *procureur du roi* after the departure of Madame Danglars and her daughter, and during the time of the conversation between Maximilian and Valentine, which we have just detailed.

Villefort entered his father's room, followed by Madame de Villefort. Both of the visitors, after saluting the old man and speaking to Barrois, a faithful servant, who had been twenty-five years in his service, took their places on each side of the paralytic old man.

Noirtier was sitting in an arm-chair, which moved upon castors, in which he was placed in the morning, and from which he was carried at night, before a large glass, which reflected the whole apartment, and permitted him to see, without any attempt to move, which would have been impossible, all who entered the room, and everything which was going on around him. Noirtier, although almost as immovable and helpless as a corpse, looked at the new-comers with a quick and intelligent expression, perceiving at once, by their ceremonious courtesy, that they were come on business of an unexpected and official character.

Sight and hearing were the only senses remaining, and they appeared left, like two solitary sparks, to animate the body which seemed fit for nothing but the grave; it was only, however, by means of one of these senses that he could reveal the thoughts and feelings which still worked in his mind, and the look by which he gave expression to this inner life resembled one of those distant lights which are sometimes seen by the benighted traveler whilst crossing some desert, apprising him that there is still one human being who, like himself, is keeping watch amidst the silence and obscurity of night.

Noirtier's hair was long and white, and flowed over his shoulders; whilst in his eyes, shaded by thick, black lashes, was concentrated, as it often happens with any organ which is used to the exclusion of the others, all the activity, address, force, and intelligence which were formerly diffused over his whole body; certainly, the movement of the arm, the sound of the voice, and the agility of the body were wanting; but the speaking eye sufficed for all. He commanded with it; it was the medium through which his thanks were conveyed.

In short, he was a corpse with living eyes; and nothing could be more startling than to observe the expression of anger or joy lighting up these marble-like features. Three persons only could understand this language of the poor paralytic: these were Villefort, Valentine, and the old servant of whom we have already spoken.

But as Villefort saw his father but seldom, and then only when absolutely obliged, and as he never took any pains to please or gratify him when he was there, all the old man's happiness was centered in his granddaughter; Valentine, by means of her love, her patience, and her devotion, had learned to read in Noirtier's look all the varied feelings which were passing in his mind. To this dumb language, which was so unintelligible to others, she answered by throwing her whole soul into the expression of the countenance, and in this manner were the conversations sustained between the blooming girl and form of clay, almost dust, who, nevertheless, possessed knowledge and penetration, united with a will as powerful as ever, although clogged by a body rendered utterly incapable of obeying its impulses. Valentine had resolved this strange problem, and was able easily to understand his thoughts, and to convey her own in return; and, by her untiring and devoted assiduity, it was seldom that, in the ordinary transactions of every-day life, she failed to anticipate the wishes of the living mind or the wants of the almost inanimate body.

As to the servant, he had, as we have said, been with his master for five-and-twenty years; therefore he knew all his habits, and it was seldom that Noirtier found it necessary to ask for anything, so prompt was he in administering to all the necessities of the invalid.

Villefort did not need the help of either Valentine or the domestic in order to carry on with his father the strange conversation which he was about to begin. As we have said, he perfectly understood the old man's vocabulary; and if he did not use it more often, it was only indifference and *ennui* which prevented him from so doing. He therefore allowed Valentine to go into the garden, sent away Barrois, and after having taken a place on the right hand of his father, whilst Madame de Villefort seated herself on the left, he addressed him thus:

"I trust you will not be displeased, sir, that Valentine has not come with us, or that I dismissed Barrois, for our conference will be one which could not with propriety be carried on in the presence of either; Madame de Villefort and I have a communication to make to you."

Noirtier's face remained perfectly passive during this long preamble; whilst, on the contrary, the eye of Villefort was endeavoring to penetrate into the inmost recesses of the old man's heart.

"This communication," continued the *procureur du roi*, in that cold and decisive tone which seemed at once to preclude all discussion, "will, we are sure, meet with your approbation."

The eye of the invalid still remained dull; he listened, nothing more.

"Sir," resumed Villefort, "we are thinking of marrying Valentine." Had the old man's face been molded in wax, it could not have shown less emotion at this news. "The marriage will take place in less than three months," said Villefort.

Noirtier's eye still retained its inanimate expression.

Madame de Villefort now took her part in the conversation, and added:

"We thought this news would possess an interest for you, sir, who have always entertained a great affection for Valentine; it therefore only now remains for us to tell you the name of the young man for whom she is destined. It is one of the most desirable connections which could possibly be formed; he possesses fortune, a high rank in society, and every personal qualification likely to render Valentine supremely happy; his name, however, cannot be wholly unknown to you. The person to whom we allude is M. Franz de Quesnel, Baron d'Epinay."

During the time that his wife was speaking, Villefort had narrowly watched the countenance of the old man. When Madame de Villefort had pronounced the name of Franz, the pupil of Noirtier's eye began to dilate, and his eyelids trembled with the same movement as may be perceived on the lips of an individual about to speak, and darted a lightning glance. The *procureur du roi*, who knew the political hatred which had formerly existed between Noirtier and the elder d'Epinay, well understood the agitation and anger; but, feigning not to perceive either, he immediately resumed the conversation commenced by his wife.

"Sir," said he, "you are aware that Valentine is about to enter her nineteenth year, which renders it important that she should lose no time in forming a suitable connection. Nevertheless, you have not been forgotten in our plans, and we have fully ascertained beforehand that Valentine's future husband will consent, not to live in this house, for that might not be pleasant for the young people, but that you should live with them; so that you and Valentine, who are so attached to each other, would not be separated, and you would be able to pursue exactly the same course of life, and thus, it will secure to you two children instead of one, to watch over you."

Noirtier's look was furious: it was very evident that something desperate was passing in the old man's mind, for the cry of anger and grief rose to his throat, and not being able to find vent in utterance, appeared almost to choke him, for his face and lips turned purple. Villefort quietly opened a window, saying:

"It is very warm, and the heat affects M. Noirtier." He then returned to his place, but did not sit down.

"This marriage," added Madame de Villefort, "is quite agreeable to the wishes of M. d'Epinay and his family; besides, he has no relations nearer than an uncle and aunt, his mother having died at his birth, and his father having been assassinated in 1815,— that is to say, when he was but two years old; he can, therefore, follow his own will."

"That assassination was a mysterious affair," said Villefort, "and the perpetrators have hitherto escaped detection; although suspicion has fallen on the head of more than one person." Noirtier made such an effort that his lips expanded into a smile.

"Now," continued Villefort, "those to whom the guilt really belongs, by whom the crime was committed, on whose heads the justice of man may probably descend here, and the certain judgment of God hereafter, would rejoice in the opportunity thus afforded of bestowing such a peace-offering as Valentine on the son of General d'Epinay." Noirtier had succeeded in mastering his emotion more than could have been deemed possible with such a shattered frame.

"Yes, I understand," was the reply contained in his look; and this look expressed a feeling of strong indignation, mixed with profound contempt. Villefort fully understood his father's meaning, and answered by a slight shrug of his shoulders. He then motioned to his wife to take leave.

"Now, sir," said Madame de Villefort, "I must bid you farewell. Would you like me to send Edward to you for a short time?"

It had been agreed that the old man should express his approbation by closing his eyes, his refusal by winking them several times, and if he had some desire or feeling to express, he raised them to heaven. If he wanted Valentine, he closed his right eye only, and if Barrois, the left. At Madame de Villefort's proposition he instantly winked his eyes.

Provoked by a complete refusal, she bit her lip and said:

"Then shall I send Valentine to you?" The old man closed his eyes eagerly, thereby intimating that such was his wish.

M. and Mme. de Villefort bowed and left the room, giving orders that Valentine should be summoned. She had already been advised that she would have to visit him during the day, and, with a color still heightened by emotion, she entered the room just after her parents had quitted it. One look was sufficient to tell her that her grandfather was suffering, and that there was much on his mind which he was wishing to communicate to her.

"Dear grandpapa," cried she, "what has happened? They have vexed you, and you are angry?"

The paralytic closed his eyes in token of assent.

"With whom! my father? No, Madame de Villefort? No, with me?"

"Me?" The former sign was repeated.

"Are you displeased with me?" cried Valentine in astonishment. Noirtier again closed his eyes.

"And what have I done, dear grandpapa, that you should be angry with me?" cried Valentine.

There was no answer; and she continued:

"I have not seen you all day. Has any one been speaking to you against me?"

"Yes," said the old man's look, with eagerness.

"Let me think a moment. I do assure you, grandpapa. Ah! — M. and Mme. de Villefort have just left this room, have they not?"

"Yes."

"And it was they who told you something which made you angry? What was it then? May I go and ask them, that I may have the opportunity of making my peace with you?"

"No, no!" said Noirtier's look.

"Ah! you frighten me. What can they have said?" And she again tried to think what it could be.

"Ah! I know," said she, lowering her voice, and going close to the old man, "they have been speaking of my marriage,— have they not?"

"Yes," replied the angry look.

"I understand; you are displeased at my silence. The reason was, they begged me not to tell you anything of it; they did not even acquaint me with their intentions, and I only discovered them by chance; that is why I have been so reserved with you, dear grandpapa. Pray forgive me."

But there was no look calculated to re-assure her: all it seemed to say was, "It is not only your reserve that afflicts me."

"What is it, then?" asked the young girl. "Perhaps you think I shall abandon you, dear grandpapa, and that I shall forget you when I am married?"

"No."

"They told you, then, that M. d'Epinay consented to our all living together."

"Yes."

"Then why are you still vexed and grieved?" The old man's eyes beamed with an expression of gentle affection.

"Yes, I understand," said Valentine; "it is because you love me." The old man assented.

"And you are afraid I shall be unhappy?"

"Yes."

"You do not like M. Franz?" The eyes repeated several times:

"No, no, no!"

"Then you are vexed with the engagement?"

"Yes."

"Well, listen," said Valentine, throwing herself on her knees, and putting her arm round her grandfather's neck, "I am vexed, too, for I do not love M. Franz d'Epinay."

An expression of intense joy illumined the old man's eyes.

"When I wished to retire into a convent, you remember how angry you were with me?" A tear trembled in the eye of the invalid. "Well," continued Valentine, "the reason of my proposing it was that I might escape this hateful marriage, which drives me to despair." Noirtier's breathing became thick and short.

"Then the idea of this marriage really grieves you too? Ah, if you could but help me — if we could both together defeat their plan! But you are unable to oppose them; you, whose mind is so quick, and whose will is so firm, are, nevertheless, as weak and unequal to the contest as I am myself. Alas, you, who would have been such a powerful protector to me in the days of your health and strength, can now only sympathize in my joys and sorrows, without being able to take any active part in them. However, this is much, and calls for gratitude; and Heaven has not taken away all my blessings when it leaves me your sympathy and kindness."

At these words there appeared in Noirtier's eye an expression of such deep meaning that the young girl thought she could read these words there:

"You are mistaken; I can still do much for you."

"Do you think you can help me, dear grandpapa?" said Valentine.

"Yes." Noirtier raised his eyes; it was the sign agreed on between him and Valentine when he wanted anything.

"What is it you want, dear grandpapa?" said Valentine. And she endeavored to recall to mind all the things he would be likely to need; and as the ideas presented themselves to her mind, she repeated them aloud; but finding that all her efforts elicited nothing but a constant "*No*," — "Come," said she, "since this plan does not answer, I will have recourse to another."

She then recited all the letters of the alphabet from A down to N. When she arrived at that letter, he made the sign "Yes."

"Ah!" said Valentine, "the thing you desire begins with the letter N; it is with N that we have to do, then. Well, let me see, what can you want which begins with N? Na—Ne—Ni—No ——"

"Yes, yes, yes," said the old man's eye.

"Ah, it is No, then?"

"Yes."

Valentine fetched a dictionary, which she placed on a desk before Noirtier; she opened it, and, seeing that the old man's eye was thoroughly fixed on its pages, she ran her finger quickly up and down the columns. During the six years which had passed since Noirtier first fell into this sad state, Valentine's powers of invention had been too often put to the test not to render her expert in devising expedients for gaining a knowledge of his wishes; and the constant practice had so perfected her in the art, that she guessed the old man's meaning as

quickly as if he himself had been able to seek for what he wanted. At the word *Notary*, Noirtier made a sign to her to stop.

"Notary," said she, "do you want a notary, dear grandpapa?" The old man again signified that it was a notary he desired.

"You would wish a notary to be sent for, then!" said Valentine.

"Yes."

"Shall my father be informed of your wish?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish the notary should be sent for immediately?"

"Yes."

"Then they shall go for him directly, dear grandpapa. Is that all you want?"

"Yes." Valentine rang the bell, and ordered the servant to tell M. or Mme. de Villefort that they were requested to come to M. Noirtier's room.

"Are you satisfied now?" inquired Valentine.

"Yes."

"I am sure you are; it is not very difficult to discover that." And the young girl smiled on her grandfather as if he had been a child. Villefort entered, followed by Barrois.

"What do you want me for, sir?" demanded he of the paralytic.

"Sir," said Valentine, "my grandfather wishes for a notary." At this strange and unexpected demand Villefort and his father exchanged looks.

"Yes," motioned the latter, with a firmness which seemed to declare that with the help of Valentine and his old servant, who both knew what his wishes were, he was quite prepared to maintain the contest.

"Do you wish for a notary?" asked Villefort.

"Yes."

"What to do?"

Noirtier made no answer.

"What do you want with a notary?" again repeated Villefort. The invalid's eye remained fixed, by which expression he intended to intimate that his resolution was unalterable.

"Is it to do us some ill turn? Do you think it is worth while?" said Villefort.

"Still," said Barrois, with the freedom and fidelity of an old servant, "if M. Noirtier asks for a notary, I suppose he really wishes for a notary; therefore I shall go at once and fetch one." Barrois acknowledged no master but Noirtier, and never allowed his desires in any way to be contradicted.

"Yes, I do want a notary," motioned the old man, shutting his eyes with a look of defiance, which seemed to say, "and I should like to see the person who dares to refuse my request."

"You shall have a notary, as you absolutely wish for one, sir," said Villefort, "but I shall make excuses for you, for the scene cannot fail of being a most ridiculous one."

Barrois.

"Never mind that," said Barrois; "I shall go and fetch a notary, nevertheless." And the old servant departed triumphantly on his mission.

CHAPTER LIX

THE WILL

AS soon as Barrois had left the room, Noirtier looked at Valentine with that peculiar expression which conveyed so much deep meaning. The young girl perfectly understood the look, and so did Villefort, for his countenance became clouded, and he knitted his eyebrows angrily. He took a seat, and quietly awaited the arrival of the notary. Noirtier saw him seat himself with an appearance of perfect indifference, at the same time giving a side look at Valentine, which made her understand that she also was to remain in the room. Three-quarters of an hour after, Barrois returned, bringing the notary with him.

“Sir,” said Villefort, after the first salutations were over, “you were sent for by M. Noirtier, whom you see here. All his limbs have become completely paralyzed, he has lost his voice also, and we ourselves find much trouble in endeavoring to catch some fragments of his meaning.”

Noirtier cast an appealing look on Valentine, which look was at once so earnest and imperative, that she answered immediately.

“Sir,” said she, “I perfectly understand my grandfather's meaning at all times.”

“That is quite true,” said Barrois, “and that is what I told the gentleman as we walked along.”

“Permit me,” said the notary, turning first to Villefort and then to Valentine, “permit me to state that the case in question is just one of those in which a public officer like myself cannot proceed to act without thereby incurring a dangerous responsibility. The first thing necessary to render an act valid is, that the notary should be thoroughly convinced that he has faithfully interpreted the will and wishes of the person dictating the act. Now, I cannot be sure of the approbation or disapprobation of a client who cannot speak; and as the object of his desire or his repugnance cannot be clearly proved to me, on account of his want of speech, my services here would be quite useless, and cannot be legally exercised."

The notary then prepared to retire. An imperceptible smile of triumph was expressed on the lips of the *procureur du roi.* Noirtier looked at Valentine with an expression so full of grief, that she arrested the departure of the notary.

"Sir," said she, "the language which I speak with my grandfather may be easily learned; and I can teach you in a few minutes to understand it almost as well as I can myself. Will you tell me what you require, in order to set your conscience quite at ease on the subject?"

"In order to render an act valid, I must be certain of the approbation or disapprobation of my client. Illness of the body would not affect the validity of the deed; but sanity of mind is absolutely requisite."

"Well, sir, by the help of two signs you may ascertain with certainty that my grandfather is still in the possession of all his mental faculties. M. Noirtier being deprived of voice and motion, closes his eyes when he wishes to signify 'yes,' and winks when he means 'no.' You now know quite enough to enable you to converse with M. Noirtier; try."

Noirtier gave Valentine such a look of tenderness and gratitude that it was comprehended even by the notary himself.

"You have heard and understood what your granddaughter has been saying, sir, have you?" asked the notary. Noirtier closed his eyes.

"And you approve of what she said,—that is to say, you declare that the signs which she mentioned are really those by means of which you are accustomed to convey your thoughts?"

"Yes."

"It was you who sent for me?"

"Yes."

"To make your will?"

"Yes."

"And you do not wish me to go away without fulfilling your original intentions?" The old man winked violently.

"Well, sir," said the young girl, "do you understand now, and is your conscience perfectly at rest on the subject?"

But before the notary could answer, Villefort had drawn him aside.

"Sir," said he, "do you suppose for a moment that a man can sustain a physical shock, such as M. Noirtier has received, without any detriment to his mental faculties?"

"It is not exactly that, sir," said the notary, "which makes me uneasy; but the difficulty will be in arriving at his thoughts and intentions, so as to be able to elicit his answers."

"You must see that to be an utter impossibility," said Villefort.

Valentine and the old man heard this conversation; and Noirtier fixed his eye so earnestly on Valentine that she felt bound to answer to the look.

"Sir," said she, "that need not make you uneasy, however difficult it may at first sight appear to be. I can discover and explain to you my grandfather's thoughts, so as to put an end to all your doubts and fears on the subject. I have now been six years with M. Noirtier, and let him tell you if ever once, during that time, he has entertained a thought which he was unable to make me understand."

"No," signed the old man.

"Let us try what we can do, then," said the notary. "You accept this young lady as your interpreter, M. Noirtier?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, what do you require of me, and what document is it that you wish to be drawn up?"

Valentine named all the letters of the alphabet until she came to W. At this letter the eloquent eye of Noirtier gave her notice that she was to stop.

"It is very evident that it is the letter W which M. Noirtier wants," said the notary.

"Wait," said Valentine; and, turning to her grandfather, she repeated, "Wa—We—Wi——" The old man stopped her at the last syllable. Valentine then took the dictionary, and the notary watched her while she turned over the pages.

She passed her finger slowly down the columns, and when she came to the word "Will," Noirtier's eye bade her stop.

"Will!" cried the notary, "it is very evident that M. Noirtier is desirous of making his will."

"Yes, yes, yes!" motioned the invalid.

"Really, sir, you must allow that this is most extraordinary," said the astonished notary, turning to Villefort.

"Yes," said the *procureur*, "and I think the will promises to be yet more extraordinary; for I cannot see how it is to be drawn up without the intervention of Valentine, and she may, perhaps, be too much interested in its contents to be a suitable interpreter of the obscure wishes of her grandfather."

"No, no, no!" replied the eye of the paralytic.

"What!" said Villefort, "do you mean to say that Valentine is not interested in your will?"

"No."

"Sir," said the notary, whose interest had been greatly excited, and who had resolved on publishing far and wide the account of this extraordinary and picturesque scene, "what appeared so impossible to me an hour ago, has now become quite easy and practicable; and this may be a perfectly valid will, provided it be read in the presence of seven

witnesses, approved by the testator, and sealed by the notary in the presence of the witnesses. As to the time, it will certainly occupy rather more than the generality of wills. There are certain forms necessary to be gone through, and which are always the same. As to the details, the greater part will be furnished afterward, by the state in which we find the affairs of the testator, and by yourself, who, having had the management of them, can give full information. But besides all this, in order that the instrument may not be contested, I am anxious to give it the greatest possible authenticity; therefore, one of my colleagues will help me, and, contrary to custom, will assist in the dictation. Are you satisfied, sir?" continued the notary, addressing the old man.

"Yes," looked the invalid, his eye delighted at being understood.

"What is he going to do?" thought Villefort, whose position demanded so much reserve, but who was longing to know what were the intentions of his father. He left the room to give orders for another notary to be sent, but Barrois, who had heard all that passed, had guessed his master's wishes, and had already gone to fetch one. The *procureur du roi* then told his wife to come up. In the course of a quarter of an hour every one had assembled in the chamber of the paralytic; the second notary had also arrived.

A few words sufficed for a mutual understanding between the two officers of the law. They read to Noirtier the formal copy of a will, in order to give him an idea of the terms in which such documents are generally couched; then, in order to test the capacity of the testator, the first notary said, turning toward him:

"When an individual makes his will, it is generally in favor or in prejudice of some person."

"Yes."

"Have you an exact idea of the amount of your fortune?"

"Yes."

"I will name to you several sums which will increase by graduation; you will stop me when I reach the one representing the amount of your own possessions?"

"Yes."

There was a kind of solemnity in this interrogation. Never had the struggle between mind and matter been more apparent than now; and if it was not a sublime, it was at least a curious spectacle. They had formed a circle round the invalid; the second notary was sitting at a table, prepared for writing, and his colleague was standing before the testator in the act of interrogating him on the subject to which we have alluded.

"Your fortune exceeds 300,000 francs, does it not?" asked he. Noirtier made a sign that it did.

"Do you possess 400,000 francs?" inquired the notary. Noirtier's eye remained inmovable.

"500,000?" The same expression continued.

"600,000—700,000—800,000—900,000?"

Noirtier stopped him at the last-named sum.

"You are in possession of 900,000 francs?" asked the attorney.

"Yes."

"In landed property?"

"No."

"In stock?"

"Yes."

"The stock is in your own hands?"

The look which Noirtier cast on Barrois showed that there was something wanting which he knew where to find; the old servant left the room, and presently returned, bringing with him a small casket.

"Do you permit us to open this casket?" asked the notary. Noirtier gave his assent.

They opened it, and found 900,000 francs in bank scrip. The first notary handed over each note, as he examined it, to his colleague.

The total amount was found to be as Noirtier had stated.

"It is all as he has said; it is very evident that the mind still retains its full force and vigor." Then, turning toward the paralytic, he said, "You possess, then, 900,000 francs of capital, which, according to the manner in which you have invested it, ought to bring in an income of about 40,000 livres?"

"Yes."

"To whom do you desire to leave this fortune?"

"Oh?" said Madame de Villefort, "there is not much doubt on that subject. M. Noirtier tenderly loves his granddaughter, Mademoiselle de Villefort; it is she who has nursed and tended him for six years, and has, by her devoted attention, fully secured the affection, I had almost said the gratitude, of her grandfather; and it is but just that she should reap the fruit of her devotion."

The eye of Noirtier clearly showed by its expression that he was not deceived by the false assent given by Madame de Villefort's words and manner to the motives which she supposed him to entertain.

"Is it, then, to Mademoiselle Valentine de Villefort that you leave these 900,000 francs?" demanded the notary, thinking he had only to insert this clause, but waiting for the assent of Noirtier, which it was necessary should be given before all the witnesses of this singular scene.

Valentine, when her name was made the subject of discussion, had stepped back, to escape unpleasant observation; her eyes were cast down, and she was crying. The old man looked at her for an instant with an expression of the deepest tenderness; then, turning toward the notary, he significantly winked his eye in token of dissent.

"What!" said the notary, "do you not intend making Mademoiselle Valentine de Villefort your residuary legatee?"

"No."

"You are not making any mistake, are you?" said the notary; "you really mean to declare that such is not your intention?"

"No, no."

Valentine raised her head; she was struck dumb with astonishment. It was not so much the conviction that she was disinherited which caused her grief, but her total inability to account for the feelings which had provoked her grandfather to such an act; but Noirtier looked at her with so much affectionate tenderness that she exclaimed:

"Oh, grandpapa! I see now that it is only your fortune of which you deprive me; you still leave me the love which I have always enjoyed."

"Ah, yes, most assuredly!" said the eyes of the paralytic; for he closed them with an expression that Valentine could not mistake.

"Thank you! thank you!" murmured she. The old man's declaration that Valentine was not the destined inheritor of his fortune had excited the hopes of Madame de Villefort; she gradually approached the invalid, and said:

"Then, doubtless, dear M. Noirtier, you intend leaving your fortune to your grandson, Edward de Villefort?"

The winking of the eyes which answered this speech was most decided and terrible, and expressed a feeling almost amounting to hatred.

"No!" said the notary; "then, perhaps, it is to your son, M. de Villefort?"

"No." The two notaries looked at each other in mute astonishment. Villefort and his wife blushed, the one from shame, the other from anger.

"What have we all done, then, dear grandpapa?" said Valentine; "you no longer seem to love any of us?"

The old man's eye passed rapidly from Villefort and his wife, and rested on Valentine with a look of unutterable fondness.

"Well," said she; "if you love me, grandpapa, try and bring that love to bear upon your actions at this present moment. You know me well enough to be quite sure that I have never thought of your fortune; besides, they say I am already rich in right of my mother, too rich, even. Explain yourself, then."

Noirtier fixed his intelligent eye on Valentine's hand.

"My hand?" said she.

"Yes."

"Her hand!" exclaimed every one.

"Oh, gentlemen! you see it is all useless, and that my father's mind is really impaired," said Villefort.

"Ah!" cried Valentine, suddenly, "I understand! it is my marriage you mean, is it not, dear grandpapa?"

"Yes, yes, yes," signed the paralytic, casting on Valentine a look of joyful gratitude for having guessed his meaning.

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"You are angry with us all on account of this marriage, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Really, this is too absurd," said Villefort.

"Excuse me, sir," replied the notary; "on the contrary, M. Noirtier's meaning is quite evident to me, and I can quite easily connect the train of ideas passing in his mind."

"You do not wish me to marry M. Franz d'Epinay?" observed Valentine.

"I do not wish it," said the eye of her grandfather.

"And you disinherit your granddaughter," continued the notary, "because she has contracted an engagement contrary to your wishes."

"Yes."

"So that, but for this marriage, she would have been your heir?"

"Yes."

There was a profound silence. The two notaries were holding a consultation as to the best means of proceeding with the affair; Valentine was looking at her grandfather with a smile of intense gratitude, and Villefort was biting his lips with vexation, whilst Madame de Villefort could not succeed in repressing an inward feeling of joy, which, in spite of herself, appeared in her whole countenance.

"But," said Villefort, who was the first to break the silence, "I consider that I am the best judge of the propriety of the marriage in question. I am the only person possessing the right to dispose of my daughter's hand. It is my wish that she should marry M. Franz d'Epinay — and she shall marry him!"

Valentine sank weeping into a chair.

"Sir," said the notary, "how do you intend disposing of your fortune in case Mademoiselle de Villefort still determines on marrying M. Franz?" The old man gave no answer.

"You will, of course, dispose of it in some way or other?"

"Yes."

"In favor of some member of your family?"

"No."

"Do you intend devoting it to charitable purposes, then?" pursued the notary.

"Yes."

"But," said the notary, "you are aware that the law does not allow a son to be entirely deprived of his patrimony?"

"Yes."

"You only intend, then, to disposes of that part of your fortune which the law allows you to subtract from the inheritance of your son?" Noirtier made no answer.

"Do you still wish to dispose of all?"

"Yes."

"But they will contest the will after your death?"

"No."

"My father knows me," replied Villefort, "he is quite sure that his wishes will be held sacred by me; besides, he understands that in my position I cannot plead against the poor." The eye of Noirtier beamed with triumph.

"What do you decide on, sir?" asked the notary of Villefort.

"Nothing, sir; it is a resolution which my father has taken, and I know he never alters his mind. I am quite resigned. These nine hundred thousand francs will go out of the family in order to enrich some hospital; but it is ridiculous thus to yield to the caprices of an old man; and I shall, therefore, act according to my conscience."

Having said this, Villefort quitted the room with his wife, leaving his father at liberty to do as he pleased. The same day the will was made, the witnesses were brought, it was approved by the old man, sealed in the presence of all, and given in charge to M. Deschamps, the family notary.

CHAPTER LX

THE TELEGRAPH

MONSIEUR AND MADAME DE VILLEFORT found on their return that the Count of Monte-Cristo, who had come to visit them in their absence, had been ushered into the drawing-room, and was still awaiting them there. Madame de Villefort, too agitated to receive him at once, retired to her bedroom, whilst the *procureur du roi*, who could better depend upon himself, proceeded at once to the drawing-room.

Although Villefort, to all outward view, had completely masked his feelings, he could not dissipate the cloud on his brow, so that the count immediately remarked his somber and thoughtful air.

"*Ma foi!*" said Monte-Cristo, after the first compliments were over, "what is the matter with you, M. de Villefort? Have I arrived at the moment that you were drawing up some case of capital indictment?"

Villefort tried to smile.

"No, M. le Comte," he replied, "I am the only victim in this case. It is I who lose my cause; and it is ill-luck, obstinacy, and folly which have caused it to be decided against me."

"To what do you allude?" said Monte-Cristo, with well-feigned interest. "Have you really met with some great misfortune?"

"Oh! M. le Comte," said Villefort, with a bitter smile, "it is only a loss of money which I have sustained—nothing worth mentioning."

"True," said Monte-Cristo, "the loss of a sum of money becomes almost immaterial with a fortune such as you possess, and a philosophic and elevated mind like yours."

"It is not so much the loss of the money which vexes me," said Villefort, "though, after all, nine hundred thousand francs are worth regretting; but I am the more annoyed with this fate, chance, or whatever you please to call the power which has destroyed my hopes of fortune, and may blast the prospects of my child also, as it is caused by the caprice of an old man relapsed into second childhood."

"What do you say?" said the count; "nine hundred thousand francs! it is indeed a sum which might be regretted even by a philosopher. And who is the cause of all this annoyance?"

"My father, of whom I have spoken to you."

"M. Noirtier! but I thought you had told me he had become entirely paralyzed, and that all his faculties were completely destroyed?"

"Yes, his bodily faculties, for he can neither move nor speak; nevertheless, he thinks, acts, and wills in the manner I have described. I left him about five minutes ago, and he is now occupied in dictating his will to two notaries."

"But to do this he must have spoken?"

"He has done better than that—he has made himself understood."

"How was such a thing possible?"

"By the help of his eyes, which are still full of life, and, as you perceive, can inflict mortal injury."

"My dear," said Madame de Villefort, who had just entered the room, "perhaps you exaggerate the evil."

"Good-morning, madame!" said the count, bowing.

Madame de Villefort acknowledged the salutation with one of her most gracious smiles.

"What is this that M. de Villefort has been telling me?" demanded Monte-Cristo, "and what incomprehensible misfortune ——"

"Incomprehensible is the word!" interrupted the *procureur du roi*, shrugging his shoulders. "An old man's caprice!"

"And is there no means of making him revoke his decision?"

"Yes," said Madame de Villefort; "and it is still entirely in the power of my husband to cause the will, which is now in prejudice of Valentine, to be altered in her favor."

The count, who perceived that M. and Mme. de Villefort were beginning to speak in parables, appeared to pay no attention to the conversation, and feigned to be watching Edward, who was pouring ink into the bird's water-glass.

"My dear," said Villefort, in answer to his wife, "you know I never play the patriarch in my family, nor have I ever considered that the fate of a universe was to be decided by my nod. Nevertheless, it is necessary that my will should be respected in my family, and that the folly of an old man and the caprice of a child should not be allowed to overturn a project entertained for years. The Baron d'Epinay was my friend, as you know, and an alliance with his son is most suitable."

"Do you think," said Madame de Villefort, "that Valentine is in league with him? She has always been opposed to this marriage, and I should not be at all surprised if what we have just seen and heard is nothing but the execution of a plan concerted between them."

"Madame," said Villefort, "believe me, a fortune of nine hundred thousand francs is not so easily renounced."

"She could renounce the world, sir, since it is only about a year ago that she proposed entering a convent."

"Never mind," replied Villefort; "I say that this marriage must take place!"

"Notwithstanding your father's wishes to the contrary?" said Madame de Villefort, selecting a new point of attack. "That is a serious thing!"

Monte-Cristo, who pretended not to be listening, heard, however, every word that was said.

"Madame," replied Villefort, "I can truly say that I have always entertained a high respect for my father, because, to the natural feeling of relationship was added the consciousness of his moral superiority. The name of father is sacred in two senses,— he should be reverenced as the author of our being, and as our master; but, under the present circumstances, I am justified in doubting the wisdom of an old man who, because he hated the father, vents his anger on the son; it would be ridiculous in me to regulate my conduct by such caprices. I shall still continue to preserve the same respect toward M. Noirtier; I will suffer, without complaint, the pecuniary deprivation to which he has subjected me; but I will remain firm in my determination, and the world shall see which party has reason on his side. Consequently I shall marry my daughter to the Baron Franz d'Epinay, because I consider it would be a proper and eligible match, and, in short, because I choose to bestow my daughter's hand on whomsoever I please."

"What!" said the count, the approbation of whose eye Villefort had frequently solicited during this speech. "What! do you say that M. Noirtier disinherits Mademoiselle de Villefort because she is going to marry M. le Baron Franz d'Epinay?"

"Yes, sir, that is the reason," said Villefort, shrugging his shoulders.

"The apparent reason, at least," said Madame de Villefort.

"The real reason, madame, I can assure you; I know my father."

"But I want to know," said Madame de Villefort, "in what way M. d'Epinay can have displeased your father more than any other person?"

"I believe I know M. Franz d'Epinay," said the count; "is he not the son of General de Quesnel, who was created Baron d'Epinay by Charles X.?"

"The same," said Villefort.

"Well! but he is a charming young man, according to my ideas."

"He is, which makes me believe that it is only an excuse of M. Noirtier's; old men are always so selfish in their affection; M. Noirtier does not wish his granddaughter to marry," said Madame de Villefort.

"But," said Monte-Cristo, "do you not know any cause for this hatred?"

"Ah, *ma foi!* who is to know?"

"Perhaps it is some political difference?"

"My father and the Baron d'Epinay lived in those stormy times of which I have only seen the few last days," said Villefort.

"Was not your father a Bonapartist?" asked Monte-Cristo; "I think I remember that you told me something of that kind."

"My father has been a Jacobin more than anything else," said Villefort, carried by his emotion beyond the bounds of prudence; "and the senator's robe, which Napoleon cast on his shoulders, only served to disguise the old man without in any degree changing him. When my father conspired, it was not for the emperor, it was against the Bourbons; for M. Noirtier possessed this peculiarity,—he never projected any Utopian schemes which could never be realized, but strove for possibilities, and he applied to the realization of these possibilities the terrible theories of the Mountain, which never shrank from any means."

"Well," said Monte-Cristo, "it is just as I thought; it was politics which brought Noirtier and M. d'Epinay into personal contact. Although General d'Epinay served under Napoleon, did he not still retain royalist sentiments? And was he not the person who was assassinated one evening on leaving a Bonapartist meeting to which he had been invited on the supposition of his favoring the cause of the emperor?"

Villefort looked at the count almost with terror.

"Am I mistaken, then?" said Monte-Cristo.

"No, sir, the facts were precisely what you have stated," said Madame de Villefort; "and it was to prevent the renewal of old feuds that M. de Villefort formed the idea of uniting the two children of these enemies."

"It was a sublime and charitable thought," said Monte-Cristo, "and the whole world should applaud it. It would be noble to see Mademoiselle Noirtier de Villefort assuming the title of Madame Franz d'Epinay."

Villefort shuddered and looked at Monte-Cristo as if he wished to read in his countenance the real feelings which had dictated the words he had just pronounced. But the count completely baffled the penetration of the *procureur du roi*, and prevented him from discovering anything beneath the never-varying smile he was so constantly in the habit of assuming.

"Although," said Villefort, "it will be a serious thing for Valentine to lose the fortune of her grandfather, I do not think that M. d'Epinay will be frightened at this pecuniary loss; he will, perhaps, hold me in greater esteem than the money itself, seeing that I sacrifice everything in order to keep my word with him; besides he knows that Valentine is rich in right of her mother, and that she will, in all probability, inherit the fortune of M. and Mme. de Saint-Méran, her mother's parents, who both love her tenderly."

"And who are fully as well worth loving and tending as M. de Noirtier," said Madame de Villefort; "besides, they are to come to Paris in about a month, and Valentine, after the affront she has received, need not continue to bury herself alive with M. Noirtier."

The count listened with satisfaction to this tale of wounded self-love and defeated ambition.

"But it seems to me," said Monte-Cristo, "and I must begin by asking your pardon for what I am about to say, that if M. Noirtier disinherits Mademoiselle de Villefort on account of her marrying a man whose father he detested, he cannot have the same cause of complaint against this dear Edward."

"True," said Madame de Villefort, with an intonation of voice which it is impossible to describe; "is it not unjust — shamefully unjust? Poor Edward is as much M. Noirtier's grandchild as Valentine, and yet, if she had not been going to marry M. Franz, M. Noirtier would have left her all his money; Edward, too, will bear the family name; and, supposing Valentine to be disinherited by her grandfather, she will still be three times richer than he."

The count listened and said no more.

"M. le Comte," said Villefort, "we will not entertain you any longer with our family misfortunes. It is true that my patrimony will go to endow the poor who to-day are really the rich, and my father will have deprived me of my lawful inheritance without any reason for doing so; but I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have acted like a man of sense and feeling. M. d'Epinay, to whom I had promised the interest of this sum, shall receive it, even if I endure the most cruel privations."

"However," said Madame de Villefort, returning to the one idea which incessantly occupied her mind, "perhaps it would be better to represent this unlucky affair to M. d'Epinay, in order to give him the opportunity of himself renouncing his claim to the hand of Mademoiselle de Villefort."

"Ah, that would be a great pity," said Villefort.

"A great pity," said Monte-Cristo.

"Undoubtedly," said Villefort, moderating the tones of his voice; "a marriage, once concerted and then broken off, throws a sort of discredit on a young lady; then, again, the old reports, which I was so anxious to put an end to, will instantly gain ground,— no, it will all go well; M. d'Epinay, if he is an honorable man, will consider himself more than ever pledged to Mademoiselle de Villefort; unless he were actuated by a decided feeling of avarice; but that is impossible."

"I agree with M. de Villefort," said Monte-Cristo, fixing his eyes on Madame de Villefort; "and if I were sufficiently intimate with him to allow of giving my advice, I would persuade him, since I have been told M. d'Epinay is coming back, to settle this affair at once, beyond all possibility of revocation. I will answer for the success of a project which will reflect so much honor on M. de Villefort."

The *procureur du roi* rose, delighted with the proposition, but his wife slightly changed color.

"Well, that is all that I wanted, and I will be guided by a counselor such as you are," said he, extending his hand to Monte-Cristo. "Therefore, let every one here look upon what has passed to-day as if it had not happened. There is no change in our original plans."

"Sir," said the count, "the world, unjust as it is, will be pleased with your resolution; your friends will be proud of you, and M. d'Epinay, even if he took Mademoiselle de Villefort without any dowry, which he will not do, would be delighted with the idea of entering a family which could make such sacrifices in order to keep a promise and fulfill a duty."

At the conclusion of these words, the count rose to depart.

"Are you going to leave us, M. le Comte?" said Madame de Villefort.

"I am sorry to say I must do so, madame; I only came to remind you of your promise for Saturday."

"Did you fear that we should forget it?"

"You are very good, madame; but M. de Villefort has so many important and urgent occupations."

"My husband has given his word, sir," said Madame de Villefort; "you have just seen him keep it when he has all to lose, and surely there is more reason for his doing so where he has all to gain!"

"And," said Villefort, "is it at your house in the Champs Elysées that you receive your visitors?"

"No," said Monte-Cristo, "and this renders your kindness more meritorious,—it is in the country."

"In the country?"

"Yes."

"Where is it, then? near Paris, is it not?"

"Very near; only half a league from the Barriers,—it is at Auteuil."

"At Auteuil?" said Villefort; "true, Madame de Villefort told me you lived at Auteuil, since it was to your house that she was taken. And in what part of Auteuil do you reside?"

"Rue de la Fontaine."

"Rue de la Fontaine!" exclaimed Villefort, in an agitated tone; "at what number?"

"No. 28."

"Then," cried Villefort, "was it you who bought M. de Saint-Méran's house?"

"Did it belong to M. de Saint-Méran?" demanded Monte-Cristo.

"Yes," replied Madame de Villefort; "and, would you believe it, M. le Comte ——"

"Believe what?"

"You think this house pretty, do you not?"

"I think it charming."

"Well! my husband would never live in it."

"Indeed!" returned Monte-Cristo; "that is a prejudice on your part, M. de Villefort, for which I am quite at a loss to account."

"I do not like Auteuil, sir," said the *procureur du roi*, making an evident effort to appear calm.

"But I hope you will not carry your antipathy so far as to deprive me of the pleasure of your company, sir!" said Monte-Cristo.

"No, M. le Comte — I hope — I assure you I will do all I can," stammered Villefort.

"Oh," said Monte-Cristo, "I allow of no excuse. On Saturday, at six o'clock, I shall be expecting you, and if you fail to come, I shall think — for how do I know to the contrary? — that this house, which has remained uninhabited for twenty years, must have some gloomy tradition or dreadful legend connected with it."

"I will come, M. le Comte,— I will be sure to come," said Villefort eagerly.

"Thank you," said Monte-Cristo; "now you must permit me to take my leave of you."

"You said before you were obliged to leave us, M. le Comte," said Madame de Villefort, "and you were about to tell us the nature of the engagement which was to deprive us of the pleasure of your society, when your attention was called to some other subject."

"Indeed, madame!" said Monte-Cristo; "I scarcely know if I dare tell you where I am going."

"Bah! Tell us!"

"Well, then, it is to see a thing on which I have sometimes mused for hours together."

"What is it?"

"A telegraph. So now I have told my secret."

"A telegraph!" repeated Madame de Villefort.

"Yes, a telegraph! I had often seen one placed at the end of a road on a hillock, and in the light of the sun its black arms, bending in every direction, always reminded one of the claws of an immense beetle; and I assure you it was never without emotion that I gazed on it, for I could not help thinking how wonderful it was that these various signs should be made to cleave the air with such precision as to convey to the distance of three hundred leagues the ideas and wishes of a man sitting at a table at one end of the line to another man similarly placed at the opposite extremity, and all this effected by the simple act of volition on the part of the individual communicating the intelligence. I began to think of genii, sylphs, gnomes, in short, of all the ministers of the occult sciences, until I laughed. Now, it never occurred to me to wish for a nearer inspection of these large insects, with their long black claws, for I always feared to find under their stone wings some little human genius fagged to death with cabals, factions, and government intrigues. But one fine day I learned that the mover of this telegraph was only a poor wretch, hired for twelve hundred francs a year, and employed all the day, not in studying the heavens like an astronomer, nor the water like an angler, nor the country around him like a dreamer, but in watching his fellow-insect, who was placed four or five leagues distant from him. At length I experienced a desire to observe nearer this living chrysalis, and to endeavor to understand the

Tower of Montlhéry.

secret part played by those insect-actors simply by means of successively pulling different pieces of string."

"And are you going there?"

"I am."

"What telegraph do you intend visiting? that of the home department, or of the observatoire?"

"Oh, no! I shall find there people who will force me to understand things of which I would prefer to remain ignorant, and who would explain to me, in spite of myself, a mystery which even they do not understand. I should wish to keep my illusions concerning insects unimpaired; it is quite enough to have those dissipated which I had formed of my fellow-creatures. I shall, therefore, not visit either of those telegraphs, but one in the open country where I shall find a good-natured simpleton petrified in his tower."

"You are a singular man," said Villefort.

"What line would you advise me to study?"

"That which is most in use just at this time."

"The Spanish one, you mean, I suppose?"

"Yes; should you like a letter to the minister that they might explain to you ——"

"No," said Monte-Cristo; "since, as I told you before, I do not wish to comprehend it. The moment I understand it, there will no longer exist a telegraph for me; it will be nothing more than a sign from M. Duchâtel, or from M. Montalivet, transmitted to the préfet of Bayonne, mystified by two Greek words, *têle graphein.* It is the insect with black claws, and the awful word which I wish to retain in my imagination in all its purity and in all its importance."

"Go, then; for in the course of two hours it will be dark, and you will not be able to see anything."

"*Ma foi!* you frighten me. Which is the nearest!"

"On the road to Bayonne?"

"Yes! On the road to Bayonne!"

"The one at Châtillon."

"And after Châtillon?"

"The tower of Montlhéry."

"Thank you. Good-bye. On Saturday I will tell you my impressions."

At the door the count was met by the two notaries, who had just completed the act which was to disinherit Valentine, and who were leaving under the conviction of having done a thing which could not fail of redounding to their credit.

MONTE-CRISTO AND THE TELEGRAPHER.

CHAPTER LXI

THE METHOD OF RIDDING A GARDENER OF DORMICE THAT EAT HIS PEACHES

NOT on the same night as he stated, but the next morning, the Count of Monte-Cristo went out by the Barrière d'Enfer, taking the road to Orléans. Leaving the village of Linas, without stopping at the telegraph, which, at the moment the count passed, threw out its long bony arms, he reached the tower of Montlhéry, situated, as every one knows, upon the highest point of the plain of that name. At the foot of the hill the count dismounted, and began to ascend the mountain by a little winding path, about eighteen inches wide; when he reached the summit he found himself stopped by a hedge, upon which green fruit had succeeded to red and white flowers.

Monte-Cristo looked for the door of the inclosure, and was not long in finding it. It was a little wooden gate, working on willow hinges, and fastened with a nail and string. The count soon understood its mechanism, and the door opened. He then found himself in a little garden, about twenty feet long by twelve wide, bounded on one side by part of the hedge, in which was formed the ingenious machine we have named a door; and on the other by the old tower, covered with ivy and studded with wild flowers.

No one would have thought, to have seen it thus wrinkled and yet adorned, like an old lady whose grandchildren come to greet her on her birthday, that it could have related some terrible scenes, if it could have added a voice to the menacing ears which an old proverb awards to walls.

The garden was crossed by a path of red gravel, edged by a border of thick box, of many years' growth, and of a tone and color that would have delighted the heart of Delacroix, our modern Rubens. This path was formed in the shape of the figure 8: thus, in its windings, making a walk of sixty feet in a garden of only twenty.

Never had Flora, the fresh and smiling goddess of gardeners, been honored with a purer or more minute worship than that which was paid to her in this little inclosure. In fact, of the twenty rose-trees which formed the *parterre*, not one bore the mark of the fly, nor was there to be seen any of those clusters of green insects which destroy plants growing in a damp soil. And yet it was not because the damp had been excluded from the garden; the earth, black as soot, the thick foliage of the trees, told it was there; besides, had natural humidity been wanting, it could have been immediately supplied by artificial means, thanks to a tank of water, sunk in one of the corners of the garden, and upon which were stationed a frog and a toad, who, from antipathy, no doubt, always remained on the two opposite sides of the basin. There was not a blade of grass to be seen in the paths, nor a weed in the flower-beds; no fine lady ever trained and watered her geraniums, her cactus, and her rhododendrons in her porcelain *jardinière* with more pains than this hitherto unseen gardener bestowed upon his little inclosure.

Monte-Cristo stopped, after having closed the door and fastened the string to the nail, and cast a look around.

"The man at the telegraph," said he, "must either engage a gardener or devote himself passionately to agriculture."

Suddenly he struck himself against something crouching behind a wheelbarrow filled with leaves; the something rose, uttering an exclamation of astonishment, and Monte-Cristo found himself facing a man about fifty years old, who was plucking strawberries, which he was placing upon vine-leaves. He had twelve leaves and about as many strawberries, which, on rising suddenly, he let fall from his hand.

"You are gathering your crop, sir?" said Monte-Cristo, smiling.

"Excuse me, sir," replied the man, raising his hand to his cap; "I am not up there, I know, but I have only just come down."

"Do not let me interfere with you in anything, my friend," said the count; "gather your strawberries, if, indeed, there are any left."

"I have ten left," said the man, "for here are eleven, and I had twenty-one, five more than last year. But I am not surprised; the spring has been warm this year, and strawberries require heat, sir. This is the reason that, instead of the sixteen I had last year, I have this year, you see, eleven, already plucked—twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. Ah, I miss three! they were here last night, sir—I am sure they were here—I counted them. It must be the son of Mère Simon who has stolen them; I saw him strolling about here this morning. Ah! the young rascal! stealing in a garden, he does not know where that may lead him to."

"Certainly, it is wrong," said Monte-Cristo, "but you should take into consideration the youth and greediness of the delinquent."

"Of course," said the gardener; "but that does not make it the less unpleasant. But, sir, once more I beg pardon; perhaps you are an officer that I am detaining here?" And he glanced timidly at the count's blue coat.

"Calm yourself, my friend," said the count, with that smile which at his will became so terrible or benevolent, and which this time beamed only with the latter expression; "I am not an inspector, but a traveler, conducted here by a curiosity he half repents of, since he causes you to lose your time."

"Ah! my time is not valuable," replied the man, with a melancholy smile. "Still, it belongs to government, and I ought not to waste it; but having received the signal that I might rest for an hour" (here he glanced at the sun-dial, for there was everything in the inclosure of Montlhéry, even a sun-dial), "and having ten minutes before me, and my strawberries being ripe, when a day longer—by the bye, sir, do you think dormice eat them?"

"Indeed, I should think not," replied Monte-Cristo; "dormice are bad neighbors for us who do not eat them preserved, as the Romans did."

"What! did the Romans eat them!" said the gardener—"eat dormice?"

"I have read so in Petronius," said the count.

"Really! they can't be nice, though they do say 'as fat as a dormouse.' It is not a wonder they are fat, sleeping all the blessed day, and only waking to eat all night. Listen. Last year I had four apricots—they stole one; I had one nectarine, only one—well, sir, they ate half of it on the wall; a splendid nectarine—I never ate a better."

"You ate it?"

"That is to say, the half that was left—you understand; it was exquisite, sir. Ah, those gentlemen never choose the worst morsels; like Mère Simon's son, who had not chosen the worst strawberries. But this year," continued the horticulturist, "I'll take care it shall not happen, even if I should be forced to sit up the whole night to watch when the strawberries are ripe."

Monte-Cristo had seen enough. Every man has a devouring passion in his heart, as every fruit has its worm; that of the man at the telegraph was horticulture. He began gathering the vine-leaves which screened the sun from the grapes, and won the heart of the gardener.

"Did you come here, sir, to see the telegraph?" he said.

"Yes, if it be not contrary to the rules."

"Oh, no," said the gardener; "there are no orders against doing so, since there is nothing dangerous, and no one knows what we are saying."

"Yes; I have been told," said the count, "that you do not yourselves understand the signals you repeat."

"Certainly, sir; and that is what I like best," said the man, smiling.

"Why do you like that best?"

"Because then I have no responsibility. I am a machine then, and nothing else; and so long as I work, nothing more is required of me."

"Is it possible," said Monte-Cristo to himself, "that I can have met with a man that has no ambition? That would spoil my plans."

"Sir," said the gardener, glancing at the sun-dial, "the ten minutes are nearly expired; I must return to my post. Will you go up with me?"

"I follow you."

Monte-Cristo entered the tower, which was divided into three stages. The lowest contained gardening implements, such as spades, rakes, watering-pots, hung against the wall; this was all the furniture. The second was the usual dwelling, or rather sleeping-place of the man; it contained a few poor articles of household furniture — a bed, a table, two chairs, a stone pitcher — and some dry herbs, hung up to the ceiling, which the count recognized as sweet peas, and of which the good man was preserving the seeds, having labeled them with as much care as if he had been master botanist in the Jardin des Plantes.

"Does it require much study to learn the art of telegraphing, sir?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"The study does not take long; it was acting as a supernumerary that was so tedious."

"And what is the pay?"

"A thousand francs, sir."

"It is nothing."

"No; but then we are lodged, as you perceive."

Monte-Cristo looked at the room. They passed on to the third stage; it was the room of the telegraph. Monte-Cristo looked in turns at the two iron handles by which the machine was worked. "It is very interesting," he said, "but it must be very tedious for a lifetime."

"Yes. At first my neck was cramped with looking at it, but at the end of a year or two I became used to it; and then we have our hours of recreation, and our holidays."

"Holidays!"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When we have a fog."

"Ah, to be sure."

"Those are indeed holidays to me; I go into the garden, I plant, I prune, I trim, I kill the insects all day long."

"How long have you been here?"

"Ten years, and five as a supernumerary make fifteen."

"You are ——"

"Fifty-five years old."

"How long must you have served to claim the pension?"

"Oh, sir, twenty-five years."

"And how much is the pension?"

"A hundred crowns."

"Poor humanity!" murmured Monte-Cristo.

"What did you say, sir?" asked the man.

"I was saying it was very interesting."

"What was?"

"All you were showing me. And you really understand none of these signals?"

"None at all."

"And have you never tried to understand them?"

"Never. Why should I?"

"But still, there are some signals only addressed to you."

"Certainly."

"And do you understand them?"

"They are always the same."

"And they mean ——"

"'*Nothing new; You have an hour;*' or '*To-morrow.*'"

"This is simple enough," said the count; "but look! is not your correspondent putting itself in motion?"

"Ah, yes; thank you, sir."

"And what is it saying — anything you understand?"

"Yes; it asks if I am ready."

"And you reply?"

"By the same sign, which, at the same time, tells my right-hand correspondent that I am ready, while it gives notice to my left-hand correspondent to prepare in his turn."

"It is very ingenious," said the count.

"You will see," said the man proudly; "in five minutes he will speak."

"I have, then, five minutes," said Monte-Cristo to himself; "it is more time than I require. My dear sir, will you allow me to ask you a question?"

"What is it, sir?"

"You are fond of gardening?"

"Passionately."

"And you would be pleased to have, instead of this terrace of twenty feet, an inclosure of two acres?"

"Sir, I should make a terrestrial paradise of it."

"You live badly on your thousand francs?"

"Badly enough; but yet I do live."

"Yes; but you have only a wretched garden!"

"True, the garden is not large."

"And then, such as it is, it is filled with dormice, who eat everything."

"Ah! they are my scourges."

"Tell me, should you have the misfortune to turn your head while your right-hand correspondent was telegraphing ——"

"I should not see him."

"Then what would happen?"

"I could not repeat the signals."

"And then?"

"Not having repeated them, through negligence, I should be fined."

"How much?"

"A hundred francs."

"The tenth of your income — that would be fine work."

"Ah!" said the man.

"Has it ever happened to you?" said Monte-Cristo.

"Once, sir, when I was grafting a rose-tree."

"Well, suppose you were to alter a signal, and substitute another?"

"Ah, that is another case; I should be turned off, and lose my pension."

"Three hundred francs?"

"A hundred crowns; yes, sir. So you see that I am not likely to do any of these things."

"Not even for fifteen years' wages? Come, it is worth thinking about?"

"For fifteen thousand francs!"

"Yes."

"Sir, you alarm me."

"Nonsense."

"Sir, you are tempting me?"

"Just so; fifteen thousand francs, do you understand?"

"Sir, let me see my right-hand correspondent!"

"On the contrary, do not look at him, but on this."

"What is it?"

"What! do you not know these little papers?"

"Bank-notes!"

"Exactly; there are fifteen of them."

"And whose are they?"

"Yours, if you like."

"Mine!" exclaimed the man, half suffocated.

"Yes; yours — your own property."

"Sir, my right-hand correspondent is signaling."

"Let him."

"Sir, you have distracted me; I shall be fined."

"That will cost you a hundred francs; you see it is your interest to take my bank-notes."

"Sir, my right-hand correspondent redoubles his signals; he is impatient."

"Never mind — take these." And the count placed the packet in the hands of the man. "Now, this is not all," he said; "you cannot live upon your fifteen thousand francs."

"I shall still have my place."

"No! you will lose it, for you are going to alter the sign of your correspondent."

"Oh, sir, what are you proposing?"

"A jest!"

"Sir, unless you force me ——"

"I think I can effectually force you." And Monte-Cristo drew another packet from his pocket. "Here are ten thousand more francs," he said; "with the fifteen thousand already in your pocket, they will make twenty-five thousand. With five thousand you can buy a pretty little house, with two acres of land; the remaining twenty thousand will bring you in a thousand francs a year."

"A garden with two acres of land!"

"And a thousand francs a year."

"Oh, heavens!"

"Come, take them!" And Monte-Cristo forced the bank-notes into his hand.

"What am I to do?"

"Nothing very difficult."

"But what is it?"

"To repeat these signs." Monte-Cristo took a paper from his pocket, upon which were drawn three signs, with numbers to indicate the order in which they were to be worked.

"There, you see it will not take long."

"Yes; but ——"

"Do this, and you will have nectarines and all the rest."

The mark was hit; red with fever, while large drops fell from his brow, the man executed, one after the other, the three signs given by the count, notwithstanding the frightful contortions of the right-hand correspondent, who, not understanding the change, began to think the gardener had become mad. As to the left-hand one, he conscientiously repeated the same signals, which were definitively carried to the Minister of the Interior.

"Now you are rich," said Monte-Cristo.

"Yes," replied the man, "but at what a price!"

"Listen, friend," said Monte-Cristo. "I do not wish to cause you any remorse; believe me, then, when I swear to you that you have wronged no man, but, on the contrary, have benefited mankind."

The man looked at the bank-notes, felt them, counted them; he turned pale, then red; then rushed into his room to drink a glass of water, but he had no time to reach the water-jug, and fainted in the midst of his dried herbs. Five minutes after the new telegram reached the minister, Debray had the horses put to his carriage, and drove to Danglars'.

"Has your husband any Spanish bonds?" he asked of the baroness.

"I think so, indeed! He has six millions worth."

"He must sell them, at whatever price."

"Why?"

"Because Don Carlos has fled from Bourges, and has returned to Spain."

"How do you know?" Debray shrugged his shoulders.

"The idea of asking how I hear the news!" he said.

The baroness did not wait for a repetition; she ran to her husband, who immediately hastened to his agent, and ordered him to sell at any price. When it was seen that Danglars sold, the Spanish funds fell directly. Danglars lost five hundred thousand francs; but he rid himself of all his Spanish shares.

The same evening the following was read in *Le Messager:*

> "*Telegraphic Dispatch.*
>
> "*The king, Don Carlos, has escaped the vigilance exercised over him at Bourges, and has returned to Spain by the Catalonian frontier. Barcelona has risen in his favor.*"

All that evening nothing was spoken of but the foresight of Danglars, who had sold his shares, and of the luck of the stock-jobber, who only lost five hundred thousand francs by such a blow. Those who had kept their shares, or bought those of Danglars, looked upon themselves as ruined, and passed a very bad night. Next morning *Le Moniteur* contained the following:

> "*It was without any foundation that 'Le Messager' yesterday announced the flight of Don Carlos and the revolt of Barcelona. The king (Don Carlos) has not left Bourges, and the Peninsula is in the enjoyment of profound peace. A telegraphic signal improperly interpreted, owing to the fog, was the cause of this error.*"

The funds rose one per cent. higher than before they had fallen. This, reckoning his loss, and what he had missed gaining, made the difference of a million to Danglars.

"Good!" said Monte-Cristo to Morrel, who was at his house when the news arrived of the strange reverse of fortune of which Danglars had been the victim, "I have just made a discovery for twenty-five thousand francs, for which I would have paid a hundred thousand."

"What have you discovered?" asked Morrel.

"I have just discovered the method of ridding a gardener of the dormice that eat his peaches."

CHAPTER LXII

THE PHANTOMS

AT first sight the exterior of the house at Auteuil presented nothing splendid, nothing one would expect from the destined residence of the magnificent Count of Monte-Cristo; but this simplicity was but according to the will of its master, who positively ordered nothing to be altered outside; this was seen by examining the interior.

Indeed, scarcely could the door be opened before the scene changed. M. Bertuccio had outdone himself in the taste displayed in furnishing, and in the rapidity with which it was executed. As formerly the Duc d'Antin had in a single night caused a whole avenue of trees to be cut down that annoyed Louis XIV., so in three days had M. Bertuccio planted an entirely bare court with poplars, large spreading sycamores shading the different parts of the house, before which, instead of the usual paving-stones, half hidden by the grass, there extended a turf lawn but that morning laid down, and upon which the water was yet glistening. For the rest, the orders had been issued by the count; he himself had given a plan to Bertuccio, marking the spot where each tree was to be planted, and the shape and extent of the lawn which was to succeed the paving-stones.

Thus the house had become unrecognizable, and Bertuccio himself declared he scarcely knew it, encircled, as it was, by a frame-work of trees. The overseer would not have objected, while he was about it, to have made some improvements in the garden, but the count had positively forbidden it to be touched. Bertuccio made amends, however, by loading the antechambers, staircases, and chimneys with flowers.

That which, above all, manifested the shrewdness of the steward and the profound science of the master, the one in carrying out the ideas of the other, was that this house, which appeared only the night before so sad and gloomy, impregnated with that sickly smell one can almost fancy to be the smell of time, had, in one day, acquired the aspect of life, was scented with its master's favorite perfumes, and had the very light regulated according to his wish. When the count arrived, he had under his touch his books and arms, his eyes rested upon his favorite pictures; his dogs, whose caresses he loved, welcomed him in the antechamber; the birds, whose songs delighted him, cheered him with their music; and the house, awakened from its long sleep, like the Sleeping Beauty in the wood, lived, sang, and bloomed like the houses we have long cherished, and in which, when we are forced to leave them, we leave a part of our souls.

The servants passed gayly along the fine court-yard; some, belonging to the kitchens, gliding down the stairs, restored but the previous day, as if they had always inhabited the house; others filling the coach-houses, where the equipages, incased and numbered, appeared to have been installed for the last fifty years; and in the stables the horses replied by neighing to the grooms, who spoke to them with much more respect than many servants pay their masters.

The library was divided into two parts on two sides of the wall, and contained upward of two thousand volumes; one division was entirely devoted to novels; and even the one which had been published but the day before was to be seen in its place in all the dignity of its red and gold binding.

On the other side of the house, to match with the library, was the conservatory, ornamented with rare flowers, blossoming in china jars; and in the midst of the greenhouse, marvelous alike to sight and smell, was a billiard-table, apparently abandoned during the last hour by the players, who had left the balls on the cloth.

One chamber alone had been respected by the magnificent Bertuccio. Before this room, to which you could ascend by the grand and go go out by the back staircase, the servants passed with curiosity, and Bertuccio with terror.

At five o'clock precisely, the count arrived before the house at Auteuil, followed by Ali. Bertuccio was awaiting this arrival with impatience, mingled with uneasiness; he hoped for some compliments, while, at the same time, he feared to have frowns. Monte-Cristo descended into the court-yard, walked all over the house, without giving any sign of approbation or displeasure, until he entered his bedroom, situated on the opposite side of the closed room; when he approached a little piece of furniture, made of rosewood, which we remember to have noticed on a previous occasion.

"That will, at least, serve to put my gloves in," he said.

"Will your excellency deign to open it?" said the delighted Bertuccio, "and you will find gloves in it."

In the rest of the furniture the count found everything he required—smelling-bottles, cigars, *bijouterie.*

"Good!" he said; and Bertuccio left enraptured, so great, so powerful, and real was the influence exercised by this man over all who surrounded him.

At precisely six o'clock the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard at the entrance door: it was our captain of Spahis, who had arrived on Médéah. "I am sure I am the first," cried Morrel; "I did it on purpose to have you a minute to myself, before every one came. Julie and Emmanuel have a thousand things to tell you. Ah! really, this is magnificent! But tell me, count, will your people take care of my horse?"

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear Maximilian—they understand."

"I mean, because he wants petting. If you had seen at what a pace he came, like the wind!"

"I should think so,—a horse that cost five thousand francs!" said Monte-Cristo, in the tone which a father would use toward a son.

"Do you regret them?" asked Morrel, with his open laugh.

"I? Certainly not!" replied the count. "No; I should only regret if the horse had not proved good."

"It is so good, that I have distanced M. de Château-Renaud, one of the best riders in France, and M. Debray, who both mount the minister's Arabians; and close at their heels are the horses of Madame Danglars, that always go at six leagues an hour."

"Then they follow you?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"See, they are here!" And at the same minute a carriage with smoking horses, accompanied by two mounted gentlemen, arrived at the gate, which opened before them. The carriage drove round, and stopped at the steps, followed by the horsemen.

The instant Debray had touched the ground, he was at the carriage-door. He offered his hand to the baroness, who, descending, took it with a peculiarity of manner imperceptible to every one but Monte-Cristo. But nothing escaped the count's notice; and he observed a little note, slipped with an indescribable ease, bespeaking the frequent practice of this manœuvre, from the hand of Madame Danglars to that of the minister's secretary.

After his wife the banker descended, pale, as though he had issued from his tomb instead of his carriage.

Madame Danglars threw a rapid and inquiring glance around, which could only be interpreted by Monte-Cristo, embracing the court-yard, the peristyle, and the front of the house; then, repressing a slight emotion, which must have been seen on her countenance if she had permitted her face to become pale, she ascended the steps, saying to Morrel:

"Sir, if you were a friend of mine, I should ask you if you would sell your horse."

Morrel smiled with an expression very like a grimace, and then turned round to Monte-Cristo, as if to ask him to extricate him from his embarrassment. The count understood him.

"Ah, madame!" he said, "why did you not make that request of me?"

"With you, sir," replied the baroness, "one can wish for nothing, one is so sure to obtain it. If it were so with M. Morrel——"

"Unfortunately," replied the count, "I am witness that M. Morrel cannot give up his horse, his honor being engaged in keeping it."

"How so?"

"He laid a wager he would tame Médéah in the space of six months. You understand now that if he were to get rid of it before the time named, he would not only lose his bet, but people would say he was afraid of it; and a brave captain of the Spahis cannot risk this, even to gratify a pretty woman, which is, in my opinion, one of the most sacred obligations in the world."

"You see my position, madame," said Morrel, bestowing a grateful smile on Monte-Cristo.

"It seems to me," said Danglars, in his coarse tone, ill concealed by a forced smile, "that you have already got horses enough."

Madame Danglars seldom allowed remarks of this kind to pass unnoticed; but to the surprise of the young people, she pretended not to hear it, and said nothing. Monte-Cristo smiled at her unusual humility, and showed her two immense porcelain jars, covered with marine plants, of a size and delicacy that could alone emanate from nature. The baroness was astonished.

"Why," said she, "you could plant one of the chestnut-trees in the Tuileries inside! How can such enormous jars have been manufactured?"

"Ah, madame!" replied Monte-Cristo, "you must not ask of us, the manufacturers of glass-muslin, such a question. It is the work of another age, constructed by the genii of earth and water."

"How so?—at what period can that have been?"

"I do not know; I have only heard that an emperor of China had an oven built expressly, and that in this oven twelve jars like this were successively baked. Two broke, from the heat of the fire; the other ten were sunk three hundred fathoms deep into the sea. The sea, knowing what was required of her, threw over them her weeds, encircled them with coral, and incrusted them with shells; the whole was cemented by two hundred years beneath these almost impervious depths, for a revolution carried away the emperor who wished to make the trial, and only left the documents proving the manufacture of the jars and their descent into the sea. At the end of two hundred years the documents were found, and they thought of bringing up the jars. Divers descended in machines, made expressly on the discovery, into the bay where they were thrown; but of ten three only remained, the rest having been broken by the waves. I am fond of these jars, upon which, perhaps, misshapen, frightful monsters have fixed their cold, dull eyes, and in which myriads of small fish have slept, seeking a refuge from the pursuit of their enemies."

Meanwhile, Danglars, who had cared little for curiosities, was mechanically tearing off the blossoms of a splendid orange-tree, one after another. When he had finished with the orange-tree, he began at the cactus; but this, not being so easily plucked as the orange-tree, pricked him dreadfully. He shuddered, and rubbed his eyes as though awaking from a dream.

"Sir," said Monte-Cristo to him, "I do not recommend my pictures to you, who possess such splendid paintings; but nevertheless, here are two by Hobbima, a Paul Potter, a Mieris, two by Gerard Douw, a Raphael, a Vandyke, a Zurbaran, and two or three by Murillo, worth looking at."

"Stay!" said Debray; "I recognize this Hobbima."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, it was proposed for the Museum."

"Which, I believe, does not contain one?" said Monte-Cristo.

"No; and yet they refuse to buy it."

"Why?" said Château-Renaud.

"You pretend not to know,—because government was not rich enough."

"Ah! pardon me!" said Château-Renaud; "I have heard of these things every day during the last eight years, and I cannot understand them yet."

"You will, by and by," said Debray.

"I think not," replied Château-Renaud.

"Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti and Count Andrea Cavalcanti!" announced Baptistin.

A black satin stock, fresh from the maker's hands, gray mustaches, a bold eye, a major's uniform, ornamented with three medals and five crosses,— in fact, the thorough bearing of an old soldier,— such was the appearance of Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, that tender father, with whom we are already acquainted. Close to him, dressed in entirely new clothes, advanced smilingly Count Andrea Cavalcanti, the dutiful son, whom we also know. The three young people were talking together. On the entrance of the new-comers, their eyes glanced from father to son, and then, naturally enough, rested on the latter, whom they began criticising.

"Cavalcanti!" said Debray,

"A fine name," said Morrel.

"Yes," said Château-Renaud, "these Italians are well named and badly dressed."

"You are fastidious, Château-Renaud," replied Debray, "those clothes are well cut and quite new."

"That is just what I find fault with. That gentleman appears to be well dressed for the first time in his life."

"Who are those gentlemen?" asked Danglars of Monte-Cristo.

"You heard — Cavalcanti."

"That tells me their name, and nothing else."

"Ah! true. You do not know the Italian nobility; the Cavalcanti are all descended from princes."

"Have they any fortune?"

"An enormous one."

"What do they do?"

"Try to spend it all. They have some business with you, I think, from what they told me the day before yesterday. I, indeed, invited them here to-day on your account. I will introduce you to them."

"But they appear to speak French with a very pure accent," said Danglars.

"The son has been educated in a college in the south; I believe near Marseilles. You will find him quite enthusiastic."

"Upon what subject?" asked Madame Danglars.

"The French ladies, madame. He has made up his mind to take a wife from Paris."

"A fine idea that of his!" said Danglars, shrugging his shoulders. Madame Danglars looked at her husband with an expression which, at any other time, would have indicated a storm, but for the second time she controlled herself.

"The baron appears thoughtful to-day," said Monte-Cristo to her; "are they going to put him in the ministry?"

"Not yet, I think. More likely he has been speculating on the Bourse, and has lost money."

"M. and Mme. de Villefort!" cried Baptistin.

They entered. Villefort, notwithstanding his self-control, was visibly affected; and when Monte-Cristo touched his hand, he felt it tremble.

"Certainly, women alone know how to dissimulate," said Monte-Cristo to himself, glancing at Madame Danglars, who was smiling on the *procureur du roi*, and embracing his wife.

After a short time, the count saw Bertuccio, who, until then, had been occupied on the other side of the house, glide into an adjoining room. He went to him.

"What do you want, M. Bertuccio?" said he.

"Your excellency has not stated the number of guests."

"Ah, true!"

"How many covers?"

"Count for yourself."

"Is every one here, your excellency?"

"Yes."

Bertuccio glanced through the door, which was ajar. The count watched him. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

"What is the matter?" said the count.

"That woman — that woman!"

"Which?"

"The one with a white dress and so many diamonds — the fair one."

"Madame Danglars?"

"I do not know her name; but it is she, sir, it is she!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"The woman of the garden! — she that was *enceinte* — she who was walking while she waited for ——"

Bertuccio stood at the open door, with his eyes starting and his hair on end.

"Waiting for whom?" Bertuccio, without answering, pointed to Villefort with something of the gesture *Macbeth* uses to point out *Banquo*.

"Oh, oh!" he at length muttered, "do you see?"

"What? Who?"

"Him!"

"Him! — M. de Villefort, the *procureur du roi?* Certainly I see him."

"Then I did not kill him!"

"Really, I think you are going mad, good Bertuccio," said the count.

"Then he is not dead!"

"No; you see plainly he is not dead. Instead of striking between the sixth and seventh left rib, as your countrymen do, you must have struck higher or lower; and life is very tenacious in these lawyers, or rather, there is no truth in anything you have told me — it was a flight of the imagination, a dream of your fancy. You went to sleep full of thoughts of vengeance; they weighed heavily upon your stomach; you had the nightmare — that's all. Come, calm yourself, and reckon: M. and Mme. de Villefort, two; M. and Mme. Danglars, four; M. de Château-Renaud, M. Debray, M. Morrel, seven; Major Bartolomeo Cavalcanti, eight."

"Eight!" repeated Bertuccio.

"Stop! You are in a shocking hurry to be off — you forget one of my guests. Lean a little to the left. Stay! look at M. Andrea Caval-

BERTUCCIO RECOGNIZES MADAME DANGLARS.

canti, that young man in a black coat, looking at Murillo's 'Madonna;' now he is turning."

This time Bertuccio would have uttered an exclamation, had not a look from Monte-Cristo silenced him.

"Benedetto?" he muttered; "fatality!"

"Half-past six o'clock has just struck, M. Bertuccio," said the count, severely; "I ordered dinner at that hour, and I do not like to wait;" and he returned to his guests, while Bertuccio, leaning against the wall, succeeded in reaching the dining-room.

Five minutes afterward the doors of the drawing-room were thrown open, and Bertuccio appearing, said, with a violent effort, "The dinner waits."

The Count of Monte-Cristo offered his arm to Madame de Villefort. "M. de Villefort," he said, "will you conduct the Baroness Danglars?"

Villefort complied, and they passed on to the dining-room.

CHAPTER LXIII

THE DINNER

IT was evident that one sentiment pervaded the whole of the guests on entering the dining-room. Each one asked himself what strange influence had conducted them to this house; and yet astonished, even uneasy though they were, they still felt they would not like to be absent. The recent events, the solitary and eccentric position of the count, his enormous, nay, almost incredible fortune, should have made men cautious, and have altogether prevented ladies visiting a house where there was no one of their own sex to receive them; and yet both men and women, had passed the bounds of prudence and decorum.

Stimulated by an invincible curiosity, there were none present, even including Cavalcanti and his son, notwithstanding the stiffness of the one and the carelessness of the other, who were not thoughtful, on finding themselves assembled at the house of this incomprehensible man. Madame Danglars had started when Villefort, on the count's invitation, offered his arm; and Villefort felt that his glance was uneasy beneath his gold spectacles, when he felt the arm of the baroness press upon his own. None of this had escaped the count, and even by this mere contact of individuals the scene had already acquired considerable interest for an observer.

Villefort had on the right hand Madame Danglars, on his left Morrel. The count was seated between Madame de Villefort and Danglars; the other seats were filled by Debray, who was placed between the two Cavalcanti, and by Château-Renaud, seated between Madame de Villefort and Morrel.

The repast was magnificent; Monte-Cristo had endeavored completely to overturn the Parisian ideas, and to feed the curiosity as much as the appetite of his guests. It was an Oriental feast that he offered to them, but of such a kind as the Arabian fairies might be supposed to prepare. Every delicious fruit that the four quarters of the globe could provide was heaped in vases from China and jars from Japan. Rare birds, retaining their most brilliant plumage, enormous fish, spread upon massive silver dishes, together with every wine produced in the Archipelago, Asia Minor, or the Cape, sparkling in bottles whose grotesque shape seemed to give an additional flavor to the wine,—all these, like one of those displays with which Apicius of old gratified his guests, passed in review before these Parisians, who understood that it was possible to expend five thousand dollars upon a dinner for ten persons, but only on the condition of eating pearls, like Cleopatra, or drinking beaten gold, like Lorenzo de Medici.

Monte-Cristo noticed the general astonishment, and began laughing and joking about it.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you will admit that, when arrived at a certain degree of fortune, the superfluities of life are all that can be desired; and the ladies will allow that, after having risen to a certain eminence of position, the ideal alone can be more exalted. Now, to follow out this reasoning, what is the marvelous?—that which we do not understand. What is it that we really desire?—that which we cannot obtain. Now, to see things which I cannot understand, to procure impossibilities, these are the study of my life. I gratify my wishes by two means—my will and my money. I take as much interest in the pursuit of some whim as you do, M. Danglars, in forming a new railway line; you, M. de Villefort, in condemning a culprit to death; you, M. Debray, in pacifying a kingdom; you, M. de Château-Renaud, in pleasing a woman; and you, Morrel, in breaking a horse that no one can ride. For example, you see these two fish,—one brought fifty leagues beyond St. Petersburg, the other five leagues from Naples. Is it not amusing to see them both on the same table?"

"What are the two fish?" asked Danglars.

"M. Château-Renaud, who has lived in Russia, will tell you the name of one, and Major Cavalcanti, who is an Italian, will tell you the name of the other."

"This one is, I think, a sterlet," said Château-Renaud.

"And that one, if I mistake not, a lamprey," said Cavalcanti.

"Just so. Now, M. Danglars, ask these gentlemen where they are caught."

"Sterlets," said Château-Renaud, "are only found in the Volga."

"And," said Cavalcanti, "I know that Lake Fusaro alone supplies lampreys of that size."

"Exactly; one comes from the Volga, and the other from Lake Fusaro."

"Impossible!" cried all the guests simultaneously.

"Well, this is just what amuses me," said Monte-Cristo. "I am like Nero — *cupitor impossibilium;* and that it is which is amusing you, at this moment. This fish, which seems so exquisite to you, is very likely no better than perch or salmon; but it seemed impossible to procure it, and here it is."

"But how could you have these fish brought to France?"

"Oh, nothing more easy. Each fish was brought over in a cask — one filled with river herbs and weeds, the other with rushes and lake plants; they were placed in a wagon built on purpose; and thus the sterlet lived twelve days, the lamprey eight; and both were alive when my cook seized them, killing one with milk and the other with wine. You do not believe me, M. Danglars!"

"I cannot help doubting," answered Danglars, with his stupid smile.

"Baptistin," said the count, "have the other fish brought in — the sterlet and the lamprey which came in the other casks, and which are yet alive."

Danglars opened his bewildered eyes; the company clapped their hands. Four servants carried in two casks covered with aquatic plants, and in each of which was breathing a fish similar to those on the table.

"But why have two of each sort?" asked Danglars.

"Merely because one might have died," carelessly answered Monte-Cristo.

"You are certainly an extraordinary man," said Danglars; "and philosophers may well say it is a fine thing to be rich."

"And to have ideas," added Madame Danglars.

"Oh, do not give me credit for this, madame; it was done by the Romans, who much esteemed them; and Pliny relates that they sent slaves from Ostia to Rome, who carried on their heads fish which he calls the *mulus*, and which, from the description, must probably be the dory. It was also considered a luxury to have them alive, it being an amusing sight to see them die; for, when dying, they change color three or four times, and, like the rainbow when it disappears, pass through all the prismatic shades; after which they were sent to the kitchen. Their agony formed part of their merit; if they were not seen alive, they were despised when dead."

"Yes," said Debray; "but then Ostia is only a few leagues from Rome."

"True," said Monte-Cristo; "but what would be the use of living one thousand eight hundred years after Lucullus, if we can do no better than he could?"

The two Cavalcanti opened their enormous eyes, but had the good sense not to say anything.

"All this is very extraordinary," said Château-Renaud; "still, what I admire the most, I confess, is the marvelous promptitude with which your orders are executed. Is it not true that you only bought this house five or six days ago."

"Certainly not longer."

"Well, I am sure it is quite transformed since last week. If I remember rightly, it had another entrance, and the court-yard was paved and empty; while to-day we have a splendid lawn, bordered by trees which appear to be a hundred years old."

"Why not? I am fond of grass and shade," said Monte-Cristo.

"Yes," said Madame de Villefort, "the door was toward the road before; and on the day of my miraculous escape you brought me into the house from the road, I remember."

"Yes, madame," said Monte-Cristo; "but I preferred having an entrance which would allow me to see the Bois de Boulogne over my gate."

"In four days!" said Morrel; "it is extraordinary!"

"Indeed," said Château-Renaud, "it seems quite miraculous to make a new house out of an old one; for it was very old, and dull too. I recollect coming for my mother to look at it when M. de Saint-Méran advertised it for sale two or three years ago."

"M. de Saint-Méran!" said Madame de Villefort; "then this house belonged to M. de Saint-Méran before you bought it?"

"It appears so," replied Monte-Cristo.

"How? do you not know of whom you purchased it?"

"No, indeed; my steward transacts all this business for me."

"It is certainly ten years since the house had been occupied," said Château-Renaud, "and it was quite melancholy to look at it, with the blinds closed, the doors locked, and the weeds in the court. Really, if the house had not belonged to the father-in-law of the *procureur du roi* one might have thought it some accursed place where a horrible crime had been committed."

Villefort, who had hitherto not tasted the three or four glasses of rare wine which were placed before him, here took one and drank it off. Monte-Cristo allowed a short time to elapse, and then said:

"It is singular, baron, but the same idea came across me the first time I entered it; it looked so gloomy I should never have bought it if my steward had not acted for me. Perhaps the fellow had been bribed by the notary."

"It is probable," stammered out Villefort; "but believe me, I have nothing to do with this corruption. This house is part of the marriage-portion of Valentine, and M. de Saint-Méran wished to sell it; for, if it had remained another year or two uninhabited, it would have fallen to ruin."

It was Morrel's turn to become pale.

"There was, above all, one room," continued Monte-Cristo, "very plain in appearance, hung with red damask, which, I know not why, appeared to me quite dramatic."

"Why so?" said Debray; "why dramatic?"

"Can we account for instinct?" said Monte-Cristo. "Are there not some places where we seem to breathe sadness?—why, we cannot tell. It is a chain of recollections—an idea which carries you back to other times, to other places—which, very likely, have no connection with the present time and place. And there is something in this room which reminds me forcibly of the chamber of the *Marchioness de Ganges* or *Desdemona*. Stay, since we have finished dinner, I will show it to you, and then we will take coffee in the garden. After dinner, the play."

Monte-Cristo looked inquiringly at his guests. Madame de Villefort rose, Monte-Cristo did the same, and the rest followed their example. Villefort and Madame Danglars remained for a moment, as if rooted to their seats; they interrogated each other with cold, glazed eyes.

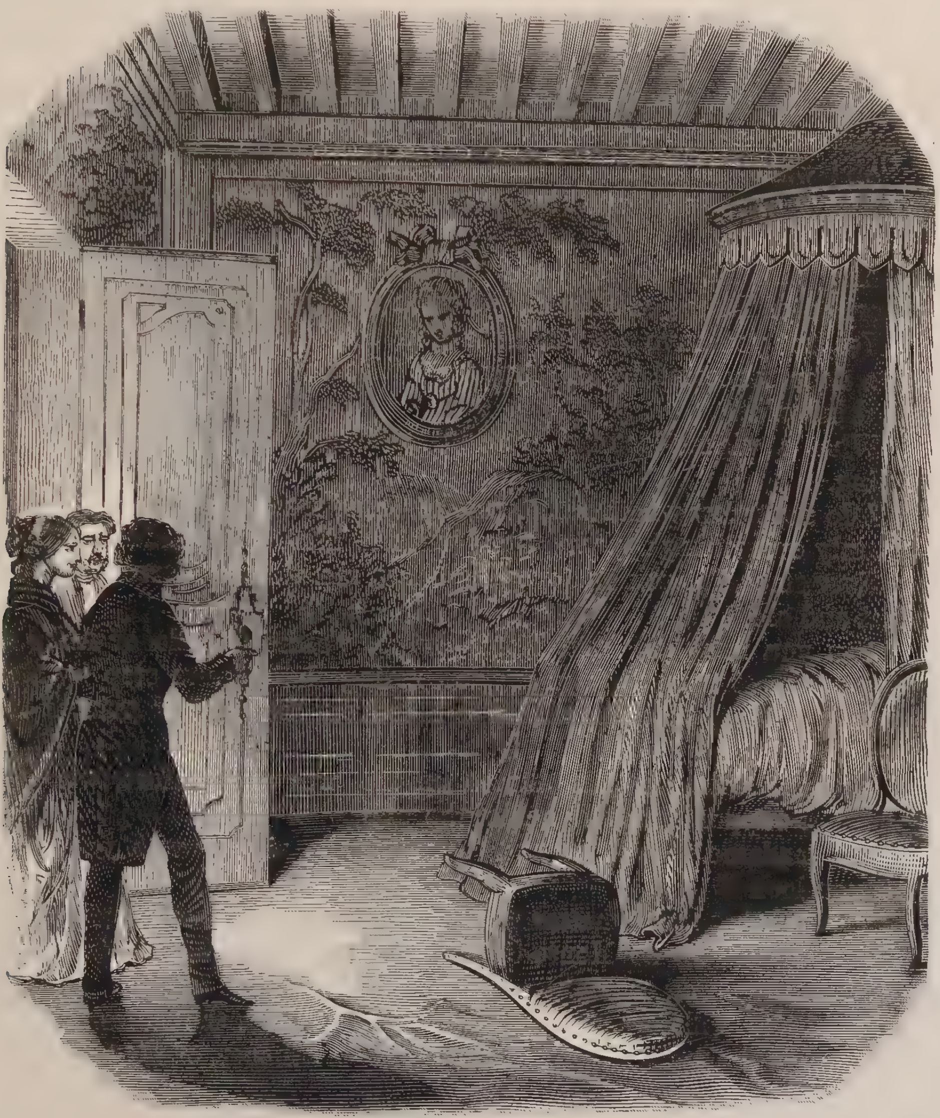
"Did you hear?" said Madame Danglars.

"We must go," replied Villefort, offering his arm.

Every one else was already scattered in different parts of the house, urged by curiosity; for they thought the visit would not be limited to the one room, and that, at the same time, they would obtain a view of the rest of the building, of which Monte-Cristo had created a palace. Each one went out by the open doors. Monte-Cristo waited for the two who remained; then, when they had passed, he closed the march with a smile, which, if they could have understood it, would have alarmed them much more than a visit to the room they were about to enter. They therefore began by walking through the apartments, many of which were fitted up in the Eastern style, with cushions and divans instead of beds, and pipes instead of furniture. The drawing-rooms were decorated with the rarest pictures by the old masters; the boudoirs hung with draperies from China, of fanciful colors, fantastic design, and wonderful texture. At length they arrived at the famous room. There was nothing particular about it, excepting that, although daylight had disappeared, it was not lighted, and everything in it remained antique, while the rest of the rooms had been re-decorated. These two causes were enough to give it a gloomy tinge.

"Oh!" cried Madame de Villefort, "it is really frightful."

Madame Danglars tried to utter a few words, but was not heard. Many observations were made, the result of which was the unanimous opinion that there was a sinister appearance in the room.



"Is it not so?" asked Monte-Cristo. "Look at that large, clumsy bed, hung with such gloomy, blood-colored drapery! And those two crayon portraits, that have faded from the damp; do they not seem to say, with their pale lips and staring eyes, 'We have seen!'"

Villefort became livid; Madame Danglars fell into a long seat placed near the chimney.

"Oh!" said Madame de Villefort, smiling, "are you courageous enough to sit down upon the very seat perhaps upon which the crime was committed?"

Madame Danglars rose suddenly.

"And then," said Monte-Cristo, "this is not all."

"What is there more?" said Debray, who had not failed to notice the agitation of Madame Danglars.

"Ah! what else is there?" said Danglars; "for, at present, I cannot say that I have seen anything extraordinary. What do you say, M. Cavalcanti?"

"Ah!" said he, "we have at Pisa the tower of Ugolino; at Ferrara, the prison of Tasso; at Rimini, the room of Francesca and Paolo."

"Yes, but you have not this little staircase," said Monte-Cristo, opening a door concealed by the drapery. "Look at it, and tell me what you think of it."

"What a wicked-looking, crooked staircase," said Château-Renaud, smiling.

"I do not know whether the wine of Chios produces melancholy, but certainly everything appears to me black in this house," said Debray.

Ever since Valentine's dowry had been mentioned, Morrel had been silent and sad.

"Can you imagine," said Monte-Cristo, "some Othello or Abbé de Ganges, one stormy, dark night, descending these stairs step by step, carrying a load, which he wishes to hide from the sight of man, if not from God?"

Madame Danglars half fainted on the arm of Villefort, who was obliged to support himself against the wall.

"Ah, madame," cried Debray, "what is the matter with you? how pale you look!"

"This is what is the matter with her," said Madame de Villefort; "it is very simple; M. de Monte-Cristo is relating horrible stories to us, doubtless intending to frighten us to death."

"Yes," said Villefort, "really, count, you frighten the ladies."

"What is the matter?" asked Debray, in a whisper, of Madame Danglars.

"Nothing," she replied, with a violent effort. "I want air! that is all."

"Will you come into the garden?" said Debray, advancing toward the back staircase.

"No, no!" she answered, "I would rather remain here."

"Are you really frightened, madame?" said Monte-Cristo.

"Oh, no, sir," said Madame Danglars; "but you suppose scenes in a manner which gives them the appearance of reality."

"Ah, yes!" said Monte-Cristo, smiling; "it is all a matter of the imagination. Why should we not imagine this the apartment of an honest family-woman? And this bed with red hangings, a bed visited by the goddess Lucina? And that mysterious staircase, the passage through which, not to disturb their sleep, the doctor and nurse pass, or even the father carrying the sleeping child?"

Here Madame Danglars, instead of being calmed by the soft picture, uttered a groan and fainted.

"Madame Danglars is ill," said Villefort; "it would be better to take her to her carriage."

"Oh! and I have forgotten my smelling-bottle!" said Monte-Cristo.

"I have mine," said Madame de Villefort; and she passed over to Monte-Cristo a bottle full of the same kind of red liquid whose good properties the count had tested on Edward.

"Ah!" said Monte-Cristo, taking it from her hand.

"Yes," she said, "at your advice I have tried."

"And have you succeeded?"

"I think so."

Madame Danglars was carried into the adjoining room; Monte-Cristo dropped a very small portion of the red liquid upon her lips; she returned to consciousness.

"Ah!" she cried, "what a frightful dream!"

Villefort pressed her hand to let her know it was not a dream. Danglars was sought, but, little interested in poetical ideas, he had gone into the garden, and was talking with Major Cavalcanti on the projected railway from Leghorn to Florence. Monte-Cristo seemed in despair. He took the arm of Madame Danglars, and conducted her into the garden, where they found Danglars taking coffee between the Cavalcanti.

"Really, madame," he said, "did I alarm you much?"

"Oh, no, sir," she answered, "but, you know, things impress us differently, according to the mood of our minds." Villefort forced a laugh.

"And then, you know," he said, "an idea, a supposition, is sufficient."

"Well," said Monte-Cristo, "you may believe me if you like, but it is my belief that a crime has been committed in this house."

"Take care!" said Madame de Villefort, "the *procureur du roi* is here."

"Ah!" replied Monte-Cristo, "since that is the case, I will take advantage of his presence to make my declaration."

"Your declaration!" said Villefort.

"Yes, before witnesses."

"Oh, this is very interesting," said Debray; "if there really has been a crime, we will investigate it."

"There has been a crime," said Monte-Cristo. "Come this way, gentlemen; come, M. Villefort, for a declaration, to be available, should be made before the competent authorities."

He then took Villefort's arm, and, at the same time, holding that of Madame Danglars under his own, he dragged the *procureur* to the plantain tree, where the shade was thickest. All the other guests followed.

"Stay," said Monte-Cristo, "here, in this very spot" (and he stamped upon the ground), "I had the earth dug up and fresh mold put in to refresh these old trees; well, my man, digging, found a box, or rather the iron-work of a box, in the midst of which was the skeleton of a newly born infant."

Monte-Cristo felt the arm of Madame Danglars stiffen, while that of Villefort trembled.

"A newly born infant!" repeated Debray; "this affair becomes serious."

"Well," said Château-Renaud, "I was not wrong just now, then, when

I said that houses had souls and faces like men, and that their exteriors carried the impress of their characters. This house was gloomy because it was remorseful; it was remorseful because it concealed a crime."

"Who said it was a crime?" asked Villefort, with a last effort.

"How? is it not a crime to bury a living child in a garden?" cried Monte-Cristo. "And, pray, what do you call such an action?"

"But who said it was buried alive?"

"Why bury it there if it were dead? This garden has never been a cemetery."

"What is done to infanticides in this country?" asked Major Cavalcanti, innocently.

"Oh, their heads are just cut off," said Danglars.

"Ah! indeed!" said Cavalcanti.

"I think so; am I not right, M. de Villefort?" asked Monte-Cristo.

"Yes, count," replied Villefort, in a voice now scarcely human.

Monte-Cristo saw that the two persons for whom he had prepared this scheme could scarcely bear it; so, not wishing to carry it too far he said:

"Come, gentlemen, some coffee; we seem to have forgotten it." And he conducted the guests back to the table on the lawn.

"Indeed, count," said Madame Danglars, "I am ashamed to own it, but all your frightful stories have so upset me, that I must beg you to let me sit down." And she fell into a chair.

Monte-Cristo bowed, and went to Madame de Villefort.

"I think Madame Danglars again requires your bottle," he said. But before Madame de Villefort could reach her friend, the *procureur* had found time to whisper to Madame Danglars, "I must speak to you."

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"Where?"

"In my office, or in the court, if you like; that is the surest place."

"I will come."

At this moment Madame de Villefort approached.

"Thanks, my dear friend," said Madame Danglars, trying to smile; "it is over now, and I am much better."

CHAPTER LXIV

THE BEGGAR

THE evening passed on; Madame de Villefort expressed a desire to return to Paris, which Madame Danglars had not dared to do, notwithstanding the uneasiness she experienced. On his wife's request, Villefort was the first to give the signal of departure. He offered a seat in his landau to Madame Danglars, that she might be under the care of his wife. As for Danglars, absorbed in an interesting conversation with Cavalcanti, he paid no attention to anything that was passing. While Monte-Cristo had begged the smelling-bottle of Madame de Villefort, he had remarked the approach of Villefort to Madame Danglars, and he soon guessed all that had passed between them, though the words had been uttered in so low a voice as hardly to be heard by Madame Danglars herself. Without opposing their arrangements, he allowed Morrel, Château-Renaud, and Debray to leave on horseback, and the ladies in Villefort's carriage. Danglars, more and more delighted with Major Cavalcanti, had offered him a seat in his carriage. Andrea Cavalcanti found his tilbury waiting at the door; the groom, in every respect a caricature of the English fashion, was standing on tiptoes to hold a large, iron-gray horse.

Andrea had spoken very little during dinner; he was an intelligent lad, and he feared to utter some absurdity before so many grand people, amongst whom he saw with dilating eyes the *procureur du roi.* Then he had been seized upon by Danglars, who, taking a rapid glance at the stiff-necked old major and his modest son, and taking into consideration the hospitality of the count, made up his mind that he was in the society of some nabob come to Paris to finish the worldly education of his only son. He contemplated with unspeakable delight the large diamond which shone on the major's little finger; for the major, like a prudent man, in case of any accident happening to his bank-notes, had immediately converted them into articles of value. Then, after dinner, on the pretext of business, he questioned the father and son upon their mode of living; and the father and son, previously informed that it was through Danglars the one was to receive his forty-eight thousand francs and the other fifty thousand livres annually, were so full of affability that they would have shaken hands even with the banker's servants, so much did their gratitude need an object to expend itself upon.

One thing above all the rest heightened the respect, nay, almost the veneration, of Danglars for Cavalcanti. The latter, faithful to the principle of Horace, *nil admirari*, had contented himself in proving his knowledge by saying in what lake the best lampreys were caught. Then he had eaten some without saying a word; Danglars, therefore, concluded that these kinds of luxuries were common at the table of the illustrious descendant of the Cavalcanti, who most likely in Lucca fed upon trout brought from Switzerland, and lobsters sent from England, by the same means used by the count to bring the lampreys from the Lake Fusaro, and the sterlet from the Volga. Thus it was with much politeness of manner that he heard Cavalcanti pronounce these words:

"To-morrow, sir, I shall have the honor of waiting upon you on business."

"And I, sir," said Danglars, "shall be most happy to receive you."

Upon which he offered to take Cavalcanti in his carriage to the Hôtel des Princes, if it would not be depriving him of the company of his son. To this Cavalcanti replied, by saying, that for some time past his son had lived independently of him; that he had his own horses and carriages, and that not having come together, it would not be difficult for them to leave separately. The major seated himself, therefore, by the side of Danglars, who was more and more charmed with the ideas of order and economy which ruled this man, and yet who, being able to allow his son fifty thousand francs a year, might be supposed to possess a fortune of five or six hundred thousand livres.

As for Andrea, he began, by way of showing off, to scold his groom, who, instead of bringing the tilbury to the steps of the house, had taken it to the outer door, thus giving him the trouble of walking thirty steps to reach it. The groom heard him with humility, took the bit of the impatient animal with his left hand, and with the right held out the reins to Andrea, who, taking them from him, rested his polished boot lightly on the step.

At that moment a hand touched his shoulder. The young man turned round, thinking that Danglars or Monte-Cristo had forgotten something they wished to tell him, and had returned just as they were starting. But instead of either of these he saw nothing but a strange face, sunburned, and encircled by a beard, with eyes brilliant as carbuncles, and a smile upon the mouth which displayed a perfect set of thirty-two white teeth, pointed and sharp as the wolf's or jackal's. A red handkerchief encircled his grayish hair; torn and filthy garments covered his large bony limbs, which seemed as though, like those of a skeleton, they would rattle as he walked; and the hand with which he leaned upon the young man's shoulder, and which was the first thing Andrea saw, seemed of a gigantic size.

Did the young man recognize that face by the light of the lantern in his tilbury, or was he merely struck with the horrible appearance of his interrogator? We cannot say, but only relate the fact that he shuddered and stepped back suddenly.

"What do you want of me?" he asked.

"Pardon, Gaffer, if I disturb you," said the man with the red handkerchief, "but I want to speak to you."

"You have no right to beg at night," said the groom, endeavoring to rid his master of the troublesome intruder.

"I am not begging, my fine fellow," said the unknown to the servant, with so ironical an expression of eye, and so frightful a smile, that he withdrew; "I only wish to say two or three words to your master, who gave me a commission to execute about a fortnight ago."

"Come," said Andrea, with sufficient nerve for his servant not to perceive his agitation, "what do you want? Speak quickly, friend."

"I wish — I wish you to spare me the walk back to Paris," said the man in a low voice, "I am very tired, and not having eaten so good a dinner as you have, I can scarcely support myself."

The young man shuddered at this strange familiarity.

"Well," he said, "well, what do you want?"

"Well, then, I want you to take me up in your fine carriage, and carry me back." Andrea turned pale, but said nothing.

"Yes!" said the man with the red kerchief, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking impudently at the youth, "I have taken the whim into my head; do you understand, Master Benedetto?"

At this name, no doubt the young man reflected a little, for he went toward his groom, saying:

"This man is right; I did indeed charge him with a commission, the result of which he must tell me; walk to the barrier, there take a cab, that you may not be too late."

The surprised groom retired.

"Let me at least reach a shady spot," said Andrea.

"Oh! as for that, I'll conduct you to a splendid spot," said the man with the handkerchief; and, taking the horse's bit, he led the tilbury to a place where it was certainly impossible for any one to witness the honor that Andrea conferred upon him.

"Don't think I want the honor of riding in your fine carriage," said he; "oh, no, it's only because I am tired, and also because I have a little business to talk over with you."

"Come, step in," said the young man. It was a pity this scene had not occurred in daylight, for it was curious to see this beggar throwing himself heavily down on the cushion beside the young and elegant driver of the tilbury. Andrea drove past the last house in the village without saying a word to his companion, who smiled complacently, as though well pleased to find himself traveling in so comfortable a vehicle. Once out of Auteuil, Andrea looked around, in order to assure himself that he could neither be seen nor heard; and then, stopping the horse and crossing his arms before the man, he asked:

"Now, tell me why you come to disturb my tranquillity?"

"Let me ask you, my boy, why you deceived me?"

"How have I deceived you?"

"How! do you ask? When we parted at the Pont du Var, you told me you were going to travel through Piedmont and Tuscany; but instead of that, you come to Paris."

"How does that annoy you?"

"It does not; on the contrary, I think it will answer my purpose."

"So," said Andrea, "you are speculating upon me?"

"What fine words he uses!"

"I warn you, Master Caderousse, that you are mistaken."

"Well, well, don't be angry, my boy; you know well enough what it is to be unfortunate; and misfortunes make us jealous. I thought you were earning a living in Tuscany or Piedmont by acting as *facchino* or *cicerone;* and I pitied you sincerely, as I would a child of my own. You know I always did call you my child."

"Come, come, what then?"

"Patience! patience!"

"I am patient, but go on."

"All at once I see you pass through the barrier with a groom, a tilbury, and fine new clothes. You must have discovered a mine, or else become a stockbroker."

"So that, as you acknowledge, you are jealous?"

"No, I am pleased — so pleased that I wished to congratulate you; but as I am not quite properly dressed, I chose my opportunity, that I might not compromise you."

"Yes, and a fine opportunity!" exclaimed Andrea; "you speak to me before my servant."

"How can I help that, my boy? I speak to you when I can catch you. You have a quick horse, a light tilbury, you are naturally as slippery as an eel; if I had missed you to-night, I might not have had another chance."

"You see, I do not conceal myself."

"You are lucky; I wish I could say as much: I do conceal myself; and then I was afraid you would not recognize me, but you did," added Caderousse, with his unpleasant smile. "It was very polite of you."

"Come," said Andrea, "what do you want?"

"You do not speak affectionately to me, Benedetto, my old friend; that is not right; take care, or I may become troublesome."

This menace smothered the young man's passion. He trotted his horse on.

"You should not speak so to an old friend like me, Caderousse, as you said just now; you are a native of Marseilles, I am ——"

"Do you know then now what you are?"

"No, but I was brought up in Corsica; you are old and obstinate, I am young and willful. Between folks like us threats are out of place, everything should be amicably arranged. Is it my fault if Fortune, which has frowned on you, has been kind to me?"

"Fortune has been kind to you, then? Your tilbury, your groom, your clothes, are not then hired? Good, so much the better," said Caderousse, his eyes sparkling with avarice.

"Oh! you knew that well enough before speaking to me," said Andrea, becoming more and more excited. "If I had been wearing a handkerchief like yours on my head, rags on my back, and worn-out shoes on my feet, you would not have known me."

"You wrong me, my boy; now I have found you, nothing prevents my being as well dressed as any one, knowing, as I do, the goodness of your heart. If you have two coats you will give me one of them. I used to divide my soup and beans with you when you were hungry."

"True," said Andrea.

"What an appetite you used to have! is it as good now?"

"Oh, yes," replied Andrea, laughing.

"How did you come to be dining with that prince whose house you have just left?"

"He is not a prince; simply a count."

"A count, and a rich one too, eh?"

"Yes; but you had better not trust to that? He is not a very good-tempered gentleman."

"Oh! be satisfied! I have no design upon your count, and you shall have him all to yourself. But," said Caderousse, again smiling with the disagreeable expression he had before assumed, "you must pay for it — you understand?"

"Well, what do you want?"

"I think that with a hundred francs per month ——"

"Well?"

"I could live ——"

"Upon a hundred francs!"

"Come — you understand me; but that with ——"

"With?"

"With a hundred and fifty francs I should be quite happy."

"Here are two hundred," said Andrea; and he placed ten louis d'or in the hand of Caderousse.

"Good!" said Caderousse.

"Apply to the steward on the first day of every month, and you will receive the same sum."

"There, now, again you degrade me."

"How so?"

"By making me apply to the servants, when I want to transact business with you alone."

"Well, be it so, then. Take it from me, then, and so long at least as I receive my income, you shall be paid yours."

"Come, come; I always said you were a fine fellow, and it is a blessing when good fortune happens to such as you. But tell me all about it?"

"Why do you wish to know?" asked Cavalcanti.

"What! do you again distrust me?"

"No; the fact is, I have found my father."

"What, a real father?"

"Yes, so long as he pays me——"

"You'll honor and believe him — that's right. What is his name?"

"Major Cavalcanti."

"Is he pleased with you?"

"So far I have appeared to answer his purpose."

"And who found this father for you?"

"The Count of Monte-Cristo."

"The man whose house you have just left?"

"Yes."

"I wish you would try and find me a situation with him as grandfather, since he holds the money-chest!"

"Well, I will mention you to him. Meanwhile, what are you going to do?"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"It is very kind of you to trouble yourself about me," said Caderousse.

"Since you interest yourself in my affairs," replied Andrea, "I think it is now my turn to ask you some questions."

"Ah, true! Well I shall rent a room in some respectable house, wear a decent coat, shave every day, and go and read the papers in a café. Then, in the evening, I will go to the theater with the leader of the *claque*; I shall look like some retired baker. This is my wish."

"Well, if you will only put this scheme into execution, and be steady, nothing could be better."

"Do you think so, M. Bossuet? And you — what will you become? A peer of France?"

"Ah!" said Andrea, "who knows?"

"Major Cavalcanti is already one, perhaps; but then, hereditary rank is abolished."

"No politics, Caderousse! And now that you have all you want, and that we understand each other, jump down from the tilbury and disappear."

"Not at all, my good friend."

"How! not at all?"

"Why, just think for a moment; with this red handkerchief on my head, with scarcely any shoes, no papers, and ten gold napoleons in my pocket, without reckoning what was there before — making in all about two hundred francs; why, I should certainly be arrested at the barriers! Then, to justify myself, I should say that you gave me the money; this would cause inquiries; it would be found that I left Toulon without giving due notice, and I should then be reconducted to the shores of the Mediterranean. Then I should become simply No. 106, and good-bye to my dream of resembling the retired baker! No, no, my boy; I prefer remaining honorably in the capital."

Andrea scowled. Certainly, as he had himself owned, the reputed son of Major Cavalcanti was a willful fellow. He drew up for a minute, threw a rapid glance around him; and, after doing so, his hand fell instantly into his pocket, where it began playing with a pistol. But, meanwhile, Caderousse, who had never taken his eyes off his companion, passed his hand behind his back, and unclasped a long Spanish knife, which he always carried with him, to be ready in case of need. The two friends, as we see, were worthy of and understood each other. Andrea's hand left his pocket inoffensively, and was carried up to the red moustachio, which it played with for some time.

"Good Caderousse," he said, "how happy you will be!"

"I will do my best," said the innkeeper of the Pont du Gard, reclasping his knife.

"Well, then, we will go into Paris. But how will you pass through the barrier without exciting suspicion? It seems to me that you are in more danger riding than on foot."

"Wait," said Caderousse, "we shall see."

He then took the great-coat with the large collar, which the groom had left behind in the tilbury, and put it on his back; then he took off Cavalcanti's hat, which he placed upon his own head; and finally assumed the careless attitude of a servant whose master drives himself.

"But, tell me," said Andrea, "am I to remain bareheaded?"

"Pooh!" said Caderousse; "it is so windy that your hat can easily appear to have blown off."

"Come, come; enough of this," said Cavalcanti.

"What are you waiting for?" said Caderousse. "I hope I am not the cause."

"*Chut!*" exclaimed Andrea. They passed the barrier without accident. At the first cross-street Andrea stopped his horse, and Caderousse leaped out.

"Well!" said Andrea, "my servant's coat and my hat?"

"Ah!" said Caderousse, "you would not like me to risk taking cold?"

"But what am I to do?"

"You! oh, you are young, whilst I am beginning to get old. *Au revoir*, Benedetto." And running into a court, he disappeared.

"Alas!" said Andrea, sighing, "one cannot be completely happy in this world!"

CHAPTER LXV

A CONJUGAL SCENE

AT the Place Louis XV. the three young people separated—that is to say, Morrel went to the Boulevards, Château-Renaud to the Pont de la Révolution, and Debray to the Quai. Most probably Morrel and Château-Renaud returned to their "domestic hearths," as they say in the gallery of the Chamber in well-turned speeches, and in the theater of the Rue Richelieu in well-written pieces; but it was not the case with Debray. When he reached the wicket of the Louvre, he turned to the left, galloped across the Carrousel, passed through the Rue Saint-Roch, and, issuing from the Rue de la Michodière, he arrived at Danglars' door just at the same time that Villefort's landau, after having deposited him and his wife at the Faubourg St. Honoré, stopped to leave the baroness at her own house.

Debray, with the air of a man familiar with the house, entered first into the court, threw his bridle into the hands of a footman, and returned to the door to receive Madame Danglars, to whom he offered his arm, to conduct her to her apartments. The gate once closed, and Debray and the baroness alone in the court, he asked:

"What was the matter with you, Hermine? and why were you so affected at that story, or rather fable, which the count related?"

"Because I have been in such shocking spirits all the evening, my friend," said the baroness.

"No, Hermine," replied Debray, "you cannot make me believe that; on the contrary, you were in excellent spirits when you arrived at the count's. M. Danglars was disagreeable, certainly; but I know how much you care for his ill-humor. Some one has vexed you; I will allow no one to annoy you."

"You are deceived, Lucien, I assure you," replied Madame Danglars, "and what I have told you is really the case, added to the ill-humor you remarked, but which I did not think it worth while to allude to."

It was evident that Madame Danglars was suffering from that nervous irritability which women frequently cannot account for even to themselves; or that, as Debray had guessed, she had experienced some secret agitation that she would not acknowledge to any one. Being a man who knew that the former of these symptoms was one of the elements of female life, he did not then press his inquiries, but waited for a more appropriate opportunity when he should again interrogate her, or receive an avowal *proprio motu.*

At the door of her apartment the baroness met Mademoiselle Cornélie, her confidential lady's maid.

"What is my daughter doing?" asked Madame Danglars.

"She practiced all the evening, and then went to bed," replied Mademoiselle Cornélie.

"Yet I think I hear her piano."

"It is Mademoiselle Louise d'Armilly, who is playing while Mademoiselle Danglars is in bed."

"Well," said Madame Danglars, "come and undress me."

They entered the bedroom. Debray stretched himself upon a large couch, and Madame Danglars passed into her dressing-room with Mademoiselle Cornélie.

"My dear M. Lucien," said Madame Danglars, through the door, "you are always complaining that Eugénie will not address a word to you."

"Madame," said Lucien, playing with a little dog, who, recognizing him as a friend of the house, expected to be caressed, "I am not the only one who makes similar complaints; I think I heard Morcerf say that he could not extract a word from his *fiancée.*"

"True," said Madame Danglars, "but yet I think this will all pass off, and that you will one day see her enter your study."

"My study?"

"At least that of the minister."

"Why so?"

"To ask for an engagement at the Opera. Really, I never saw such an infatuation for music; it is quite ridiculous for a young lady of fashion."

Debray smiled. "Well," said he, "let her come, with your consent and that of the baron, and we will try and give her an engagement, though we are very poor to pay such talent as hers."

"Go, Cornélie," said Madame Danglars, "I do not require you any longer."

Cornélie obeyed; and the next minute Madame Danglars left her room in a charming loose dress, and came and sat down close to

Debray. Then, thoughtful, she began to caress the little spaniel. Lucien looked at her for a moment in silence.

"Come, Hermine," he said, after a short time, "answer candidly,—something vexes you, is it not so?"

Louise d'Armilly.

"Nothing," answered the baroness.

And yet, as she could scarcely breathe, she rose and went toward a looking-glass. "I am frightful to-night," she said. Debray rose, smiling, and was about to contradict the baroness upon this latter point, when the door opened suddenly. M. Danglars appeared; Debray reseated himself. At the noise of the door Madame Danglars turned round, and looked upon her husband with an astonishment she took no trouble to conceal.

"Good-evening, madame!" said the banker; "good-evening, M. Debray!"

Probably the baroness thought this unexpected visit signified a desire to repair the sharp words he had uttered during the day. Assuming a dignified air, she turned round to Debray, without answering her husband:

"Read me something, M. Debray," she said. Debray, who was slightly disturbed at this visit, recovered himself when he saw the calmness of the baroness, and took up a book marked by a mother-of-pearl knife inlaid with gold.

"Excuse me," said the banker, "but you will tire yourself, baroness, by such late hours, and M. Debray lives some distance from here."

Debray was petrified, not only to hear Danglars speak so calmly and politely, but that it was apparent that beneath this forced appearance there really lurked a determined spirit of opposition to anything his wife wished that evening. The baroness was also surprised, and showed her astonishment by a look which would doubtless have had some effect upon her husband if he had not been intently occupied with the paper, where he was seeking the closing price of the funds. The result was, that the proud look entirely failed.

"M. Lucien," said the baroness, "I assure you I have no desire to sleep, and that I have a thousand things to tell you this evening, which you must listen to, even though you slept while hearing me."

"I am at your service, madame," said Lucien coldly.

"My dear M. Debray," said the banker, "do not kill yourself to-night listening to the follies of Madame Danglars, for you can hear them as well to-morrow; but I claim to-night, and will dedicate it, if you will allow me, to talk over some serious matters with my wife."

This time the blow was so well aimed, and hit so directly, that Lucien and the baroness were staggered; and they interrogated each other with their eyes, as if to seek help against this aggression; but the irresistible will of the master of the house prevailed, and the husband was victorious.

"Do not think I wish to turn you out, my dear Debray," continued Danglars; "oh, no! not at all! An unexpected occurrence forces me to ask my wife to have a little conversation with me; it is so rarely I make such a request, I am sure you cannot grudge it to me."

Debray muttered something, bowed, and went out, knocking himself against the edge of the door, like *Nathan* in "Athalie."

"It is extraordinary," he said, when the door was closed behind him, "how easily these husbands, whom we ridicule, gain an advantage over us."

Lucien having left, Danglars took his place on the sofa, closed the open book, and placing himself in a dreadfully dictatorial attitude, he began playing with the dog; but the animal, not liking him so well as Debray, and attempting to bite him, Danglars seized him by the skin of his neck, and threw him to the other side of the room upon a couch.

Boulevards.

The animal uttered a cry during the transit, but, arriving at its destination, it crouched behind the cushions, and, stupefied at such unusual treatment, remained silent and motionless.

"Do you know, sir," asked the baroness, "that you are improving? Generally you are only rude, but to-night you are brutal."

"It is because I am in a worse humor than usual," replied Danglars. Hermine looked at the banker with supreme disdain. These glances frequently exasperated the pride of Danglars, but this evening he took no notice of them.

"And what have I to do with your ill-humor?" said the baroness, irritated at the impassability of her husband; "do these things concern me? Keep your ill-humor at the office in your desk; or, since you have clerks whom you pay, vent it upon them."

"Not so," replied Danglars; "your advice is wrong, so I shall not follow it. My desk is my Pactolus, as, I think, M. Demoustier says, and I will not retard its course or disturb its calm. My clerks are honest men, who earn my fortune, whom I pay much below their deserts, if I may value them according to what they bring in; therefore I shall not get into a passion with them; those with whom I will be in a passion are those who eat my dinners, mount my horses, and exhaust my fortune."

"And pray, who are the persons who exhaust your fortune? Explain yourself more clearly, I beg, sir."

"Oh, make yourself easy! — I am not speaking riddles, and you will soon know what I mean. The people who exhaust my fortune are those who draw out seven hundred thousand francs in the course of an hour."

"I do not understand you, sir," said the baroness, trying to disguise the agitation of her voice and the flush of her face.

"You understand me perfectly, on the contrary," said Danglars; "but, if you will persist, I will tell you that I have just lost seven hundred thousand francs upon the Spanish loan."

"And pray," asked the baroness, "am I responsible for this loss?"

"Why not?"

"Is it my fault you have lost seven hundred thousand francs?"

"Certainly it is not mine."

"Once for all, sir," replied the baroness, sharply, "I tell you I will not hear cash named; it is a style of language I never heard in the house of my parents or in that of my first husband."

"Oh! I can well believe that, for neither of them was worth a penny."

"The better reason for my not being conversant with the slang of the bank, which is here dinning in my ears, from morning to night; that noise of crowns jingling, which are constantly being counted and recounted, is odious to me. I only know one thing I dislike more, which is the sound of your voice."

"Really!" said Danglars. "Well, this surprises me, for I thought you took the liveliest interest in my affairs!"

"I! What could put such an idea into your head?"

"Yourself!"

"I should like to know upon what occasion?"

"Ah, that is very easily done! Last February you were the first who told me of the Haytian funds. You had dreamed that a ship had entered the harbor at Hâvre, that this ship brought news that a payment we had looked upon as lost was going to be made. I know how clear-sighted your dreams are; I therefore purchased immediately as many shares as I could of the Haytian debt, and I gained four hundred thousand francs by it, of which one hundred thousand have been honestly paid to you. You spent it as you pleased, that was your business. In March there was a question about a grant to a railway. Three companies presented themselves, each offering equal securities. You told me that your instinct,—and although you pretended to know nothing about speculations, I think, on the contrary, that your comprehension is very clear upon certain affairs,—well, you told me that your instinct led you to believe the grant would be given to the company called the Southern. I bought two-thirds of the shares of that company; as you had foreseen, the shares became of triple value, and I picked up a million, from which two hundred and fifty thousand francs were paid to you for pin-money. How have you spent this two hundred and fifty thousand francs?—it is no business of mine."

"When are you coming to the point?" cried the baroness, shivering with anger and impatience.

"Patience, madame, I am coming to it."

"That's fortunate!"

"In April you went to dine at the minister's. You heard a private conversation respecting the affairs of Spain—on the expulsion of Don Carlos. I bought some Spanish shares. The expulsion took place, and I pocketed six hundred thousand francs the day Charles V. repassed the Bidassoa. Of these six hundred thousand francs you took fifty thousand crowns. They were yours, you disposed of them according to your fancy, and I asked no questions; but it is not the less true that you have this year received five hundred thousand livres."

"Well, sir, and what then?"

"Ah, yes, it was just after this that you spoiled everything!"

"Really, your manner of speaking——"

"It expresses my meaning, and that is all I want. Well, three days after that you talked politics with M. Debray, and you fancied from his words that Don Carlos had returned to Spain. Well, I sold my shares, the news was spread, and I no longer sold but gave them; next day I find the news was false, and by this false report I have lost seven hundred thousand francs."

"Well?"

"Well, since I gave you a fourth of my gains, I think you owe me a fourth of my losses; the fourth of seven hundred thousand francs is one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs."

"What you say is absurd, and I cannot see why M. Debray's name is mixed up in this affair."

"Because if you do not possess the one hundred and seventy-five thousand francs I reclaim, you must have lent them to your friends, and M. Debray is one of your friends."

"For shame!" exclaimed the baroness.

"Oh! let us have no gestures, no screams, no modern drama, or you will oblige me to tell you that I see Debray leave here, pocketing nearly the whole of the five hundred thousand livres you have handed over to him this year; while he smiles to himself, saying that he has found that which the most skillful players have never discovered — that is, a roulette, where he wins without playing, and is no loser when he loses."

The baroness became enraged.

"Wretch!" she cried, "will you dare to tell me you did not know that with which you now reproach me?"

"I do not say that I did know it, and I do not say that I did not know it. I merely tell you to look into my conduct during the last four years that we have ceased to be husband and wife, and see whether it has not always been consistent. Some time after our rupture, you wished to study music under the celebrated baritone who made such a successful *début* at the Théâtre Italien; at the same time I felt inclined to learn dancing of the *danseuse* who acquired such a reputation in London. This cost me, on your account and mine, one hundred thousand francs. I said nothing, for we must have peace in the house; and one hundred thousand francs for a lady and gentleman to be properly instructed in music and dancing are not too much. Well, you soon become tired of singing, and you take a fancy to study diplomacy with the minister's secretary. You understand; it signifies nothing to me so long as you pay for your lessons out of your own cash-box. But to-day I find you are drawing on mine, and that your apprenticeship may cost me seven hundred thousand francs per month. Stop there, madame! for this cannot last. Either the diplomatist must give his lessons gratis, and I will tolerate him, or he must never again set his foot in my house; do you understand, madame?"

"Oh, this is too much!" cried Hermine, choking; "you are worse than despicable."

"But," continued Danglars, "I find you did not even pause there ——"

"Insults!"

"You are right; let us be precise about our facts, and reason coolly. I have never interfered in your affairs, excepting for your good; treat me in the same way. You say you have nothing to do with my cash-box. Be it so. Do as you like with your own, but do not fill or empty mine. Besides, how do I know that this was not a political trick; that the minister, enraged at seeing me in the opposition, and jealous of the popular sympathy I excite, has not concerted with M. Debray to ruin me?"

"A probable thing!"

"Why not! Who ever heard of such an occurrence as this?—a false telegraphic dispatch—it is almost impossible for signals to have been made different to those of the two last telegrams. It was done on purpose for me, I am sure of it."

"Sir," said the baroness, humbly, "are you not aware that the man employed there was dismissed, that they talked of indicting him, that orders were issued to arrest him, and that this order would have been put into execution if he had not escaped their researches by a flight which proves either his madness or his culpability. It was a mistake."

"Yes, which made fools laugh, which caused the minister to have a sleepless night, which has caused the minister's secretaries to blacken several sheets of paper, but which has cost me seven hundred thousand francs."

"But, sir," said Hermine, suddenly, "if all this is, as you say, caused by M. Debray, why, instead of going direct to him, do you come and tell me of it? Why to accuse the man do you address the woman?"

"Do I know M. Debray? do I wish to know him? do I wish to know that he gives advice? do I wish to follow it? do I speculate? No; you do all this, not I."

"Still it seems to me that, as you profit by it ——"

Danglars shrugged his shoulders. "Foolish creatures, these women!" he exclaimed. "They fancy they have talent because they have managed two or three intrigues without being the talk of Paris! But know that if you had even hidden your irregularities from your husband, which is but the A B C of the art,— for generally husbands *will* not see,— you would then have been but a faint imitation of most of your friends among the women of the world. But it has not been so with me,—I see, and always have seen, during the last sixteen years. You may, perhaps, have hidden a thought; but not a step, not an action, not a fault has escaped me; while you flattered yourself upon your address, and firmly believed you had deceived me. What has been the result?— that, thanks to my pretended ignorance, there are none of your friends, from M. de Villefort to M. Debray, who have not trembled before me. There is not one who has not treated me as the master of the house,— the only title I desire with respect to you; there is not one, in fact, who would have dared to speak to you of me as I have spoken to you of them this day. I will allow you to make me hateful; but I will prevent your rendering me ridiculous, and, above all, I forbid you to ruin me."

The baroness had been tolerably composed until the name of Villefort had been pronounced; but then she became pale, and, rising, as if touched by a spring, she stretched out her hands as though conjuring an apparition; she then took two or three steps toward her husband, as though to tear the secret from him, of which he was ignorant, or which he withheld from some odious calculation, as all his calculations were.

"M. de Villefort! — What do you mean?"

"I mean that M. de Nargonne, your first husband, being neither a philosopher nor a banker, or perhaps being both, and seeing there was nothing to be got out of a *procureur du roi*, died of grief or anger at finding, after an absence of nine months, that you had been *enceinte* six. I am brutal,—I not only allow it, but boast of it; it is one of the reasons of my success in business. Why did he kill himself instead of you? Because he had no cash to save. My life belongs to my cash-box. My associate M. Debray has made me lose seven hundred thousand francs; let him bear his share of the loss, and we will go on as before; if not, let him become bankrupt for the one hundred and seventy-five thousand livres, and do as all bankrupts do—disappear. He is a charming fellow, I allow, when his news is correct; but when it is not, there are fifty others in the world who would do better than him."

Madame Danglars was rooted to the spot; she made a violent effort to reply to this last attack; but she fell upon a chair, thinking of Villefort or the dinner scene, of the strange series of misfortunes which had taken place in her house during the last few days, and changed the usual calm of her establishment to a scene of scandalous debate.

Danglars did not even look at her, though she tried all she could to faint. He shut the bedroom-door after him, without adding another word, and returned to his apartments; and when Madame Danglars recovered from her half-fainting condition, she could almost believe she had had a disagreeable dream.

CHAPTER LXVI

MATRIMONIAL PROJECTS

THE day following this scene, at the hour when Debray usually chose to pay a visit to Madame Danglars, on his way to his office, his *coupé* did not appear in the court. At this time, that is, about half-past twelve, Madame Danglars ordered her carriage, and went out. Danglars, placed behind a curtain, watched the departure he had been waiting for. He gave orders that he should be informed directly Madame Danglars re-appeared; but at two o'clock she had not returned. He then called for his horses, drove to the Chamber, and inscribed his name to speak against the budget. From twelve to two o'clock Danglars had remained in his study, unsealing his dispatches, and becoming more and more sad every minute, heaping figure upon figure, and receiving, among other visits, one from Major Cavalcanti, who, as stiff and as exact as ever, presented himself precisely at the hour named the night before, to terminate his business with the banker.

On leaving the Chamber, Danglars, who had shown violent marks of agitation during the sitting, and been more bitter than ever against the ministry, reëntered his carriage, and told the coachman to drive to the Avenue des Champs Elysées, No. 30.

Monte-Cristo was at home; only he was engaged with some one, and begged Danglars to wait for a moment in the drawing-room. While the banker was waiting, the door opened, and a man dressed as an abbé entered, who, doubtless more familiar with the house than he was, instead of waiting, merely bowed, and, passing on to the further apartments, disappeared.

A minute after, the door by which the priest had entered re-opened, and Monte-Cristo appeared.

"Pardon me," said he, "my dear baron, but one of my friends, the Abbé Busoni, whom you perhaps saw pass by, has just arrived in Paris; not having seen him for a long time, I could not make up my mind to leave him sooner, so I hope this will be sufficient reason for my having made you wait."

"Nay," said Danglars, "it is my fault; I have chosen a wrong time, and will retire."

"Not at all; on the contrary, be seated. But what is the matter with you? You look careworn; really, you alarm me! For a capitalist to be sad, like the appearance of a comet, presages some misfortune to the world."

"I have been in ill-luck for several days," said Danglars, "and I have heard nothing but bad news."

"Ah, indeed!" said Monte-Cristo. "Have you had another fall at the Bourse?"

"No; I am safe for a few days at least. I am only annoyed about a bankrupt of Trieste."

"Really! Does it happen to be Jacopo Manfredi?"

"Exactly so. Imagine a man who has transacted business with me for I do not know how long, to the amount of eight hundred thousand or nine hundred thousand francs during the year. Never a mistake or delay: a fellow who paid like a prince. Well, I was a million in advance with him, and now my fine Jacopo Manfredi suspends payment!"

"Really?"

"It is an unheard-of fatality. I draw upon him for six hundred thousand francs, my bills are returned unpaid, and, more than that, I hold bills of exchange signed by him to the value of four hundred thousand francs, payable at his correspondent's in Paris at the end of this month. To-day is the 30th. I present them; but my correspondent has disappeared. This, with my Spanish affairs, made a pretty end to the month."

"Then you really lost by that affair in Spain?"

"Yes: only seven hundred thousand francs out of my cash-box! — nothing more!"

"Why, how could you make such a mistake — such an old stager?"

"Oh, it is all my wife's fault. She dreamed Don Carlos had returned to Spain; she believes in dreams. It is magnetism, she says; and when she dreams a thing it is sure to happen, she assures me. On this conviction I allow her to speculate; she has her bank and her stockbroker; she speculated and lost. It is true she speculates with her own money, not mine; nevertheless, you can understand that when seven hundred thousand francs leave the wife's pocket, the husband always finds it out. But do you mean to say you have not heard of this? Why, the thing has made a tremendous noise."

"Yes, I heard it spoken of, but I did not know the details; and then no one can be more ignorant than I am of the affairs in the Bourse."

"Then you do not speculate?"

"I?—How could I speculate when I already have so much trouble in regulating my income? I should be obliged, besides my steward, to keep a clerk and a boy. But touching these Spanish affairs, I think the baroness did not dream the whole of this entrance of Don Carlos. The papers said something about it, did they not?"

"Then you believe the newspapers?"

"I? not the least in the world; only I fancied that the honest *Messager* was an exception to the rule, and that it only announced telegraphic dispatches."

"Well! this is what puzzles me," replied Danglars; "the news of the return of Don Carlos was brought by telegraph."

"So that," said Monte-Cristo, "you have lost nearly one million seven hundred thousand francs this month."

"Not nearly, indeed; that is exactly my loss."

"*Diable!*" said Monte-Cristo, compassionately, "it is a hard blow for a third-rate fortune."

"Third-rate," said Danglars, rather humbled, "what do you mean by that?"

"Certainly," continued Monte-Cristo, "I make three classes — first-rate, second-rate, and third-rate fortunes. I call those first-rate which are composed of treasures one possesses under one's hand, such as mines, lands, and funded property, in such states as France, Austria, and England, provided these treasures and property form a total of about a hundred millions; I call those second-rate fortunes investments in manufacturing enterprises, joint-stock companies, viceroyalties, and principalities, not drawing more than one million five hundred thousand francs, the whole forming a capital of about fifty millions; finally, I call those third-rate fortunes composed of a fluctuating capital, dependent upon the will of others, or upon chances which a bankruptcy involves or a false telegram shakes: such as banks, speculations of the day — in fact, all operations under the influence of greater or less mischances, the whole bringing in a real or fictitious capital of about fifteen millions. I think this is about your position, is it not?"

"Confound it! yes!" replied Danglars.

"The result, then, of six more such months as this would be to reduce the third-rate house to despair."

"Oh!" said Danglars, becoming very pale, "how you are running on!"

"Let us imagine seven such months," continued Monte-Cristo, in the same tone. "Tell me, have you ever thought that seven times one million seven hundred thousand francs make nearly twelve millions? No, you have not; well, you are right, for if you indulged in such reflections, you would never risk your principal, which is to the speculator what the skin is to civilized man. We have our clothes, some more splendid than others — this is our credit; but when a man dies he has only his skin. In the same way, on retiring from business, you have nothing but your real principal of about five or six millions, at the most; for third-rate fortunes are never more than a fourth of what they appear to be, like the locomotive on a railway, the size of which is magnified by the smoke and steam surrounding it. Well, out of the five or six millions which form your real capital, you have just lost nearly two millions, which must, of course, in the same degree diminish your credit and fictitious fortune; to follow out my simile, your skin has been opened by bleeding, which, repeated three or four times, will cause death — so pay attention to it, M. Danglars. Do you want money? Do you wish me to lend you some?"

"What a bad calculator you are!" exclaimed Danglars, calling to his assistance all his philosophy and dissimulation. "I have made money at the same time by speculations which have succeeded. I have made up for the loss of blood by nutrition. I lost a battle in Spain, I have been defeated in Trieste, but my naval army in India will have taken some galleons, and my Mexican pioneers will have discovered some mine."

"Very good! very good! But the wound remains, and will re-open at the first loss."

"No! for I am only embarked in certainties," replied Danglars, with the air of a mountebank sounding out his own praises; "to involve me, three governments must crumble to dust."

"Well! such things have been!"

"That there should be a famine!"

"Recollect the seven fat and the seven lean kine."

"Or, that the sea should become dry, as in the days of Pharaoh; and even then my vessels would become caravans."

"So much the better, I congratulate you, my dear M. Danglars," said Monte-Cristo; "I see I was deceived, and that you belong to the class of second-rate fortunes."

"I think I may aspire to that honor," said Danglars with a smile, which reminded Monte-Cristo of one of those sickly moons which bad artists are so fond of daubing into their pictures of ruins; "but, while we are speaking of business," he added, pleased to find an opportunity of changing the subject, "tell me what I am to do for M. Cavalcanti."

"Give him money, if he is recommended to you, and the recommendation seems good."

"Excellent! he presented himself this morning with a bond of forty thousand francs, payable at sight, on you, signed by Busoni, and returned by you to me, with your indorsement; of course, I immediately counted him over the forty bank-notes."

Monte-Cristo nodded his head in token of assent.

"But that is not all," continued Danglars; "he has opened an account with my house for his son."

"May I ask how much he allows the young man?"

"Five thousand francs per month."

"Sixty thousand francs per year! I thought I was right in believing that Cavalcanti to be a stingy fellow. How can a young man live upon five thousand francs a month?"

"But you understand that if the young man should want a few thousands more ——"

"Do not advance it; the father will never repay it; you do not know these ultramontane millionaires; they are regular misers. And by whom were they recommended to you?"

"Oh, by the house of Fenzi, one of the best in Florence."

"I do not mean to say you will lose, but, nevertheless, mind you hold to the terms of the agreement."

"Would you not trust the Cavalcanti!"

"I? oh, I would advance six millions on his signature. I was only speaking in reference to the second-rate fortunes we were mentioning just now."

"And with all this, how plain he is! I should never have taken him for anything more than a mere major."

"And you have flattered him, for certainly, as you say, he has no manner. The first time I saw him he appeared to me like an old lieutenant who had grown moldy beneath his epaulette. But all the Italians are the same; they are like old Jews when they are not glittering in Oriental splendor."

"The young man is better," said Danglars.

"Yes; a little nervous, perhaps, but, upon the whole, he appeared tolerable. I was uneasy about him."

"Why?"

"Because you met him at my house, just after his introduction into the world, as they told me. He has been traveling with a very severe tutor, and had never been to Paris before."

"Ah, I believe Italian noblemen marry amongst themselves, do they not?" asked Danglars, carelessly; "they like to unite their fortunes."

"It is usual, certainly; but Cavalcanti is an original who does nothing like other people. I cannot help thinking he has brought his son to France to choose a wife."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you have heard his fortune mentioned?"

"Nothing else was talked of; only some said he was worth millions, and others that he did not possess a cent."

"And what is your opinion?"

"I ought not to influence you, because it is only my own personal impression."

"Well, and it is that ——"

"My opinion is, that all these old *podestats*, these ancient *condottieri*, for the Cavalcanti have commanded armies and governed provinces,—my opinion, I say, is, that they have buried their millions in corners, the secret of which they have only transmitted to their eldest sons, who have done the same from generation to generation; and the proof of this is seen in their yellow and dry appearance, like the florins of the republic, which have become reflected in their looks."

"Certainly," said Danglars, "and this is further supported by the fact of their not possessing an inch of land."

"Very little, at least; I know of none which Cavalcanti possesses, excepting his palace in Lucca."

"Ah! he has a palace?" said Danglars, laughing; "come, that is something."

"Yes; and more than that, he lets it to the Minister of Finance, while he lives in a simple house. Oh! as I told you before, I think the good man very close!"

"Come, you do not flatter him."

"I scarcely know him; I think I have seen him three times in my life; all I know relating to him is through Busoni and himself; he was telling me this morning that, tired of letting his property lie dormant in Italy, which is a dead nation, he wished to find a method, either in France or England, of multiplying his millions; but remember, that though I place great confidence in Busoni personally, I am not responsible for this."

"Never mind; accept my thanks for the client you have sent me; it is a fine name to inscribe on my ledger, and my cashier was quite proud of it when I explained to him who the Cavalcanti were. By the way, this is merely a simple question: When these kind of people marry their sons, do they give them any fortune?"

"Oh, that depends upon circumstances. I know an Italian prince, rich as a gold mine, one of the noblest families in Tuscany, who, when his sons married according to his wish, gave them millions; but when they married against his consent, merely allowed them thirty crowns a month. Should Andrea marry according to his father's views, he will perhaps give him one, two, or three millions. For example, supposing it were the daughter of a banker, he might take an interest in the house of the father-in-law of his son; then again, if he disliked his choice, the major takes the key, double-locks his coffer, and Master Andrea would be obliged to live like the son of a Parisian family, by shuffling cards or rattling the dice."

"Ah, that boy will find out some Bavarian or Peruvian princess; he will want a crown, an Eldorado, and Potosi."

"No; these grand lords on the other side of the Alps frequently marry into plain families; like Jupiter, they like to cross the race. But do you wish to marry Andrea, my dear M. Danglars, that you are asking so many questions?"

"*Ma foi!*" said Danglars, "it would not be a bad speculation, I fancy; and you know I am a speculator."

"You are not thinking of Mademoiselle Danglars, I hope; you would not like poor Andrea to have his throat cut by Albert?"

"Albert!" repeated Danglars, shrugging his shoulders; "ah, yes; he would care very little about it, I think."

"But he is betrothed to your daughter, I believe?"

"Certainly, M. de Morcerf and I have talked about this marriage, but Madame de Morcerf and Albert ——"

"You do not mean to say that it would not be a good match?"

"Indeed, I imagine that Mademoiselle Danglars is as good as M. de Morcerf."

"Mademoiselle Danglars' fortune will be great, no doubt, especially if the telegraph should not make any more mistakes."

"Oh! I do not mean her fortune only; but tell me ——"

"What!"

"Why did you not invite M. and Madame de Morcerf to your dinner?"

"I did so, but he excused himself on account of Madame de Morcerf being obliged to go to Dieppe for the benefit of sea air."

"Yes, yes," said Danglars, laughing, "it would do her a great deal of good."

"Why so?"

"Because it is the air she always breathed in her youth."

Monte-Cristo took no notice of this ill-natured remark.

"But still, if Albert be not so rich as Mademoiselle Danglars," said the count "you must allow that he has a fine name?"

"So he has; but I like mine as well."

"Certainly; your name is popular, and does honor to the title they intended to adorn you with; but you are too intelligent not to know that according to a prejudice, too firmly rooted to be exterminated, a nobility which dates back five centuries is worth more than one that can only reckon twenty years."

"And for this very reason," said Danglars, with a smile, which he tried to make sardonic, "I prefer M. Andrea Cavalcanti to M. Albert de Morcerf."

"Still, I should not think the Morcerfs would yield to the Cavalcanti?"

"The Morcerfs! — Stay, my dear count," said Danglars; "you are a clever man, are you not?"

"I think so."

"And you understand heraldry?"

"A little."

"Well, look at my coat-of-arms; it is worth more than Morcerf's."

"Why so?"

"Because, though I am not a baron by birth, my real name is, at least, Danglars."

"Well, what then?"

"While his name is not Morcerf."

"How! — not Morcerf?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Go on!"

"I have been made a baron, so that I actually am one; he made himself a count, so that he is not one at all."

"Impossible!"

"Listen, my dear count; M. de Morcerf has been my friend, or rather my acquaintance, during the last thirty years. You know I have made the most of my arms, though I never forgot my origin."

"A proof of great humility or great pride," said Monte-Cristo.

"Well, when I was a clerk, Morcerf was a mere fisherman."

"And then he was called ——"

"Fernand."

"Only Fernand?"

"Fernand Mondego."

"You are sure?"

"*Pardieu!* I have bought enough fish of him to know his name."

"Then, why did you think of giving your daughter to him?"

"Because Fernand and Danglars, being both *parvenus*, both having become noble, both rich, are about equal in worth, excepting that there have been certain things mentioned of him that were never said of me."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Ah, yes! what you tell me recalls to mind something about the name of Fernand Mondego. I have heard that name in Greece."

"In conjunction with the affairs of Ali Pacha?"

"Exactly so."

"This is the mystery," said Danglars; "I acknowledge I would have given anything to find it out."

"It would be very easy if you much wished it?"

"How so?"

"Probably you have some correspondent in Greece?"

"I should think so."

"At Janina?"

"Everywhere."

"Well, write to your correspondent in Janina, and ask him what part was played by a Frenchman named Fernand Mondego in the catastrophe of Ali Tebelin."

"You are right!" exclaimed Danglars, rising quickly, "I will write to-day."

"Do so."

"I will."

"And if you should hear of anything very scandalous ——"

"I will communicate it to you."

"You will oblige me."

Danglars rushed out of the room, and made but one leap into his *coupé*.

CHAPTER LXVII

THE OFFICE OF THE PROCUREUR DU ROI

LET us leave the banker driving his horses at their fullest speed, and follow Madame Danglars in her morning excursion. We have said that, at half-past twelve o'clock, Madame Danglars had ordered her horses, and had left home in the carriage. She directed her course toward the Faubourg Saint-Germain, went down the Rue de Seine, and stopped at the Passage du Pont-Neuf. She descended, and crossed the passage. She was very plainly dressed, as would be the case with a woman of taste walking in the morning. At the Rue Guénégaud she called a *fiacre*, telling the driver to go to the Rue de Harlay. As soon as she was seated in the coach, she drew from her pocket a very thick black veil, which she tied on to her straw bonnet. She then replaced the bonnet, and saw with pleasure, in a little pocket-mirror, that her white complexion and brilliant eyes were alone visible. The *fiacre* crossed the Pont-Neuf and entered the Rue de Harlay by the Place Dauphine; the driver was paid as the door opened, and stepping lightly up the stairs, Madame Danglars soon reached the Salle des Pas-Perdus.

There was a great deal doing every morning, and many business-like persons at the Palais; business-like persons pay very little attention to women, and Madame Danglars crossed the hall without exciting any more attention than any other lady calling upon her lawyer.

There was a great press of people in Villefort's antechamber; but Madame Danglars had no occasion even to pronounce her name; the instant she appeared the doorkeeper rose, came to her, and asked her whether she was not the person with whom M. *le Procureur du Roi* had made an appointment, and on her affirmative answer being given, he conducted her by a private passage to Villefort's office.

The magistrate was seated in an arm-chair, writing, with his back toward the door; he heard it open, and the doorkeeper pronounce the words, "Walk in, madame," and then reclose it, without moving; but no sooner had the man's footsteps ceased, than he started up, drew the bolts, closed the curtains, and examined every corner of the room.

Then, when he had assured himself that he could neither be seen nor heard, and was consequently relieved of doubts, he said:

"Thanks, madame,—thanks for your punctuality." And he offered a chair to Madame Danglars, which she accepted, for her heart beat so violently that she felt nearly suffocated.

"It is a long time, madame," said the *procureur du roi*, describing a half-circle with his chair, so as to place himself exactly opposite to Madame Danglars,—"it is a long time since I had the pleasure of speaking alone with you; and I regret that we have only now met to enter upon a painful conversation."

"Nevertheless, sir, you see I have answered your first appeal; although certainly the conversation must be much more painful for me than for you." Villefort smiled bitterly.

"It is true, then," he said, rather uttering his thoughts aloud than addressing his companion,—"it is true, then, that all our actions leave their traces—some sad, others bright—on our paths! It is, then, true that every step in our lives resembles the course of a reptile on the sand—it leaves its track! Alas! to many the path is traced by tears."

"Sir," said Madame Danglars, "you can feel for my emotion, can you not? Spare me, then, I beseech you. When I look at this room, whence so many guilty creatures have departed trembling and ashamed—when I look at that chair before which I now sit trembling and ashamed, oh! it requires all my reason to convince me that I am not a very guilty woman and you a menacing judge."

Villefort dropped his head and sighed.

"And I," he said, "I feel that my place is not in the judge's seat, but on the prisoner's bench."

"You?" said Madame Danglars.

"Yes, me."

"I think, sir, you exaggerate your situation," said Madame Danglars, whose beautiful eyes sparkled for a moment. "The paths of which you were just speaking have been traced by all young men of ardent imaginations. Besides the pleasure, there is always remorse. It is for this that the Gospel, that refuge of the unhappy, has given us for our support the parable of the woman taken in adultery and the woman who was a sinner. And I, recalling the raptures of my youth, think, sometimes, that God will pardon them, as balanced, if not excused by my suffering. But after all, what have you men to fear from all this; the world excuses, and notoriety ennobles you?"

"Madame," replied Villefort, "you know that I am no hypocrite, or, at least, that I never deceive without a reason. If my brow be severe, it is because many misfortunes have clouded it; if my heart be petrified, it is that it might sustain the blows it has received. I was not so in my youth, I was not so on the night of the betrothal, when we were all seated round a table in the Rue du Cours at Marseilles. But since then everything has changed in and about me; I am accustomed to brave difficulties, and, in the conflict, to crush those who, by their own free

"I FEEL THAT MY PLACE IS NOT IN THE JUDGE'S SEAT, BUT ON THE PRISONER'S BENCH."

will, or by chance, voluntarily or involuntarily, interfere with me in my career. It is generally the case that what we most ardently desire is as ardently withheld from us by those who wish to obtain it, or from whom we attempt to snatch it. Thus, the greater number of a man's errors come before him disguised under the specious form of necessity; then, after error has been committed in a moment of excitement, of delirium, or of fear, we see that we might have avoided and escaped it. The means we might have used, which we in our blindness could not see, then seem simple and easy, and we say, 'Why did I not do this, instead of that?' Women, on the contrary, are rarely tormented with remorse; for the decision does not come from you; your misfortunes are generally imposed upon you, and your faults the result of others' crimes."

"In any case, sir, you will allow," replied Madame Danglars, "that, even if the fault were alone mine, I last night received a severe punishment for it."

"Poor thing!" said Villefort, pressing her hand, "it was too severe for your strength, for you were twice overwhelmed, and yet ——"

"Well?"

"Well, I must tell you. Collect all your courage, for you have not yet heard all!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Danglars, alarmed, "what is there more to hear!"

"You only look back to the past; and it is, indeed, bad enough. Well, picture to yourself a future more gloomy still — certainly frightful, perhaps sanguinary!"

The baroness knew how calm Villefort naturally was, and his present excitement frightened her so much that she opened her mouth to scream, but the sound died in her throat.

"How has this terrible past been recalled?" cried Villefort; "how is it that it has escaped from the depths of the tomb and the recesses of our hearts, where it was buried, to visit us now like a phantom, whitening our cheeks and flushing our brows with shame?"

"Alas!" said Hermine, "doubtless it is chance!"

"Chance!" replied Villefort; "no, no, madame, there is no such thing as chance!"

"Oh, yes; has not a fatal chance revealed all this? Was it not by chance the Count of Monte-Cristo bought this house? Was it not by chance he caused the earth to be dug? Is it not by chance that the unfortunate child was disinterred under the trees? That poor innocent offspring of mine, which I never even kissed, but for whom I wept many, many tears. Ah, my heart clung to the count when he mentioned the dear remains found beneath the flowers."

"Well, no, madame!—this is the terrible news I have to tell you," said Villefort, in a hollow voice—"no, nothing was found beneath the flowers; there was no child disinterred—no! You must not weep, no, you must not groan, you must not tremble!"

"What can you mean?" asked Madame Danglars, shuddering.

"I mean that M. de Monte-Cristo, digging underneath these trees, found neither skeleton nor chest, because neither of them was there!"

"Neither of them there?" repeated Madame Danglars, fixing upon him her eyes, which, by their fearful dilatation, indicated how much she was alarmed. "Neither of them there!" she again said, as though striving to impress herself with the meaning of the words which escaped her.

"No!" said Villefort, burying his face in his hands, "no! a hundred times no!"

"Then you did not bury the poor child there, sir? Why did you deceive me? Where did you place it? tell me—where?"

"There! But listen to me—listen—and you will pity one who has for twenty years alone borne the heavy burden of grief I am about to reveal, without casting the least portion upon you."

"Oh, you frighten me! But speak; I will listen."

"You recollect that sad night, when you were half expiring on that bed in the red damask room, while I, scarcely less agitated than you, awaited your delivery. The child was born, was given to me—without movement, without breath, without voice, we thought it dead."

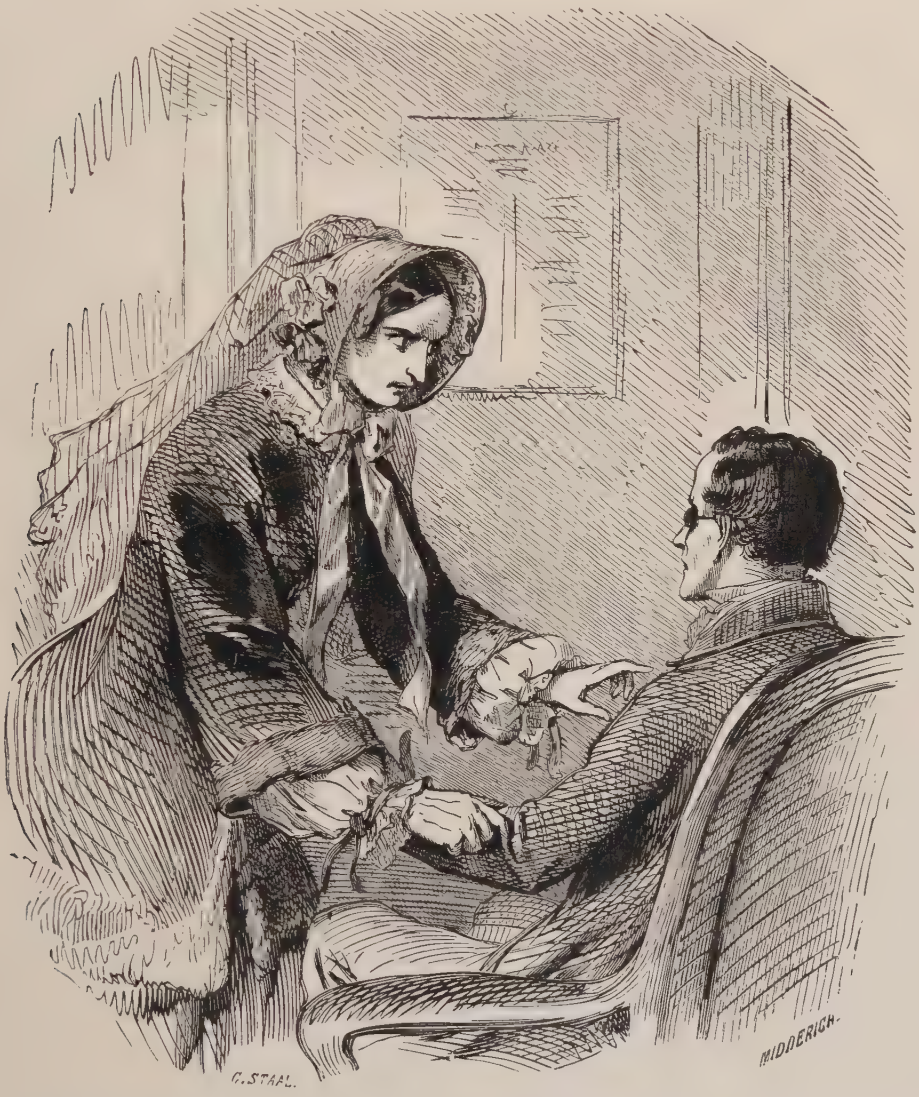
Madame Danglars moved rapidly, as though she would spring from her chair; but Villefort stopped, and clasped his hands as if to implore her attention.

"We thought it dead," he repeated; "I placed it in the box, which was to take the place of a coffin; I descended to the garden, I dug a hole, and then flung it down in haste. Scarcely had I covered it with mold, when the arm of the Corsican was stretched toward me; I saw a shadow rise, and, at the same time, a flash of light. I felt pain; I wished to cry out, but an icy shiver ran through my veins and stifled my voice; I fell lifeless, and fancied myself killed. Never shall I forget your sublime courage, when, having returned to consciousness, I dragged myself to the foot of the stairs, where, expiring yourself, you came to meet me. We were obliged to keep silent upon the dreadful catastrophe. You had the fortitude to regain the house, assisted by your nurse. A duel was the pretext for my wound. Though we scarcely expected it, our secret remained in our own keeping alone. I was taken to Versailles; for three months I struggled with death; at last, as I seemed to cling to life, I was ordered to the south. Four men carried me from Paris to Châlons, walking six leagues a day. Madame de Villefort followed the litter in her carriage. At Châlons I was put upon the Saône, thence I passed on to the Rhône, whence I descended, merely with the current, to Arles; at Arles I was again placed on my litter, and continued my journey to Marseilles. My recovery lasted ten months. I never heard you mentioned, and I did not dare inquire for you. When I returned to Paris, I learned that, widow of M. de Nargonne, you had married M. Danglars.

"What had been the subject of my thoughts ever since consciousness had returned to me? Always the same — always the child's corpse, which, every night in my dreams, rising from the earth, fixed itself above the grave with a menacing look and gesture. I inquired immediately on my return to Paris; the house had not been inhabited since we left it, but it had just been let for nine years. I found the tenant. I pretended that I disliked the idea of a house belonging to my wife's father and mother passing into the hands of strangers. I offered to pay them for yielding up the lease; they demanded six thousand francs. I would have given ten thousand. I would have given twenty thousand. I had the money with me; I made the tenant sign the canceling deed, and when I had obtained what I so much wanted, I galloped to Auteuil. No one had entered the house since I had left it. It was five o'clock in the afternoon; I ascended into the red room, and waited for night. There all the thoughts which had disturbed me during my year of constant agony occurred with double force. The Corsican, who had declared the *vendetta* against me, who had followed me from Nîmes to Paris, who had hid himself in the garden, who had struck me, had seen me dig the grave, had seen me inter the child; he might become acquainted with your person — nay, he might even then have known it. Would he not one day make you pay for keeping this terrible secret? Would it not be a sweet revenge for him when he found I had not died from the blow of his dagger? It was therefore necessary, before everything else, and at all risks, that I should cause all traces of the past to disappear — that I should destroy every material vestige: too much reality would always remain in my recollection. It was for this I had annulled the lease — it was for this I had come — it was for this I was waiting.

"Night arrived; I allowed it to become quite dark. I was without a light in that room; when the wind shook all the doors, behind which I continually expected to see some concealed spy, I trembled. I seemed everywhere to hear your moans behind me in the bed, and I dared not turn round. My heart beat so violently that I feared my wound would open. At length, one by one, all the noises of the country ceased. I understood that I had nothing to fear, that I should neither be seen nor heard, so I decided upon descending to the garden.

"Listen, Hermine! I consider myself as brave as most men, but when I drew from my breast the little key of the staircase, which I had found in my coat,—that little key we both used to cherish so much, which you wished to have fastened to a golden ring,—when I opened the door, and saw the pale moon shedding a long stream of white light on the spiral staircase like a specter, I leaned against the wall, and nearly shrieked. I seemed to be going mad. At last I mastered my agitation. I descended the staircase step by step; the only thing I could not conquer was a strange trembling in my knees. I grasped the railings; if I had relaxed my hold for a moment, I should have fallen. I reached the lower door. Outside this door a spade was placed against the wall; I took it, and advanced toward the thicket. I had provided myself with a dark-lantern. In the middle of the lawn I stopped to light it, then I continued my path. It was the end of November; all the freshness of the garden had disappeared, and the trees were nothing more than skeletons with their long bony arms, and the dead leaves sounded on the gravel under my feet. My terror overcame me to such a degree as I approached the thicket, that I took a pistol from my pocket and cocked it. I fancied continually that I saw the figure of the Corsican between the branches. I examined the thicket with my dark-lantern; it was empty. I cast my eyes all round; I was indeed alone; no noise disturbed the silence of the night but the owl, whose piercing cry seemed as if calling up the phantoms of the night. I tied my lantern to a forked branch I had remarked a year before at the precise spot where I stopped to dig the hole. The grass had grown very thickly there during the summer, and when autumn arrived no one had been there to mow it. Still one place less thickly covered attracted my attention; it evidently was there I had turned up the ground. I returned to work. The hour, then, for which I had been waiting during the last year had at length arrived. How I worked, how I hoped, how I sounded every piece of turf, thinking to find some resistance to my spade! But no, I found nothing, though I had made a hole twice as large as the first. I thought I had been deceived—had mistaken the spot. I turned round, I looked at the trees, I tried to recall the details which had struck me at the time. A cold, sharp wind whistled through the leafless branches, and yet the drops fell from my forehead. I recollected that I was stabbed just as I was trampling the ground to fill up the hole; while doing so, I had leaned against a false ebony-tree; behind me was an artificial rock, intended to serve as a resting-place for persons walking in the garden; in falling, my hand, relaxing its hold of the tree, felt the coldness of this stone. On my right I saw the tree, behind me the rock. I stood in the same attitude, and threw myself down. I rose, and again began digging and enlarging the hole; still I found nothing, nothing — the chest was no longer there!"



"The chest no longer there!" murmured Madame Danglars, choking with fear.

"Think not I contented myself with this one effort," continued Villefort. "No; I searched the whole thicket. I thought the assassin, having discovered the chest, and supposing it to be a treasure, had intended carrying it off; but, perceiving his error, had dug another hole and deposited it; but there was nothing. Then the idea struck me that he had not taken these precautions, and had simply thrown it in a corner. In the last case I must wait for daylight to make my research. I regained the room and waited."

"Oh, Heaven!"

"When daylight dawned I went down again. My first visit was to the thicket. I hoped to find some traces which had escaped me in the dark. I had turned up the earth over a surface of more than twenty feet square, and a depth of two feet. A laborer would not have done in a day what occupied me an hour. But I could find nothing — absolutely nothing. Then I renewed the search. Supposing it had been thrown aside, it would probably be on the path which led to the little gate; but this examination was as useless as the first, and with a bursting heart I returned to the thicket, which now contained no hope for me."

"Oh," cried Madame Danglars, "it was enough to drive you mad!"

"I hoped for a moment that it might," said Villefort; "but that happiness was denied me. However, recovering my strength and my ideas, 'Why,' said I, 'should that man have carried away the corpse?'"

"But you said," replied Madame Danglars, "he would require it as a proof."

"Ah, no, madame, that could not be. Dead bodies are not kept a year; they are shown to a magistrate, and the evidence is taken. Now, nothing of the kind has happened."

"What then?" asked Hermine, trembling violently.

"Something more terrible, more fatal, more alarming for us! — the child was, perhaps, alive, and the assassin may have saved it!"

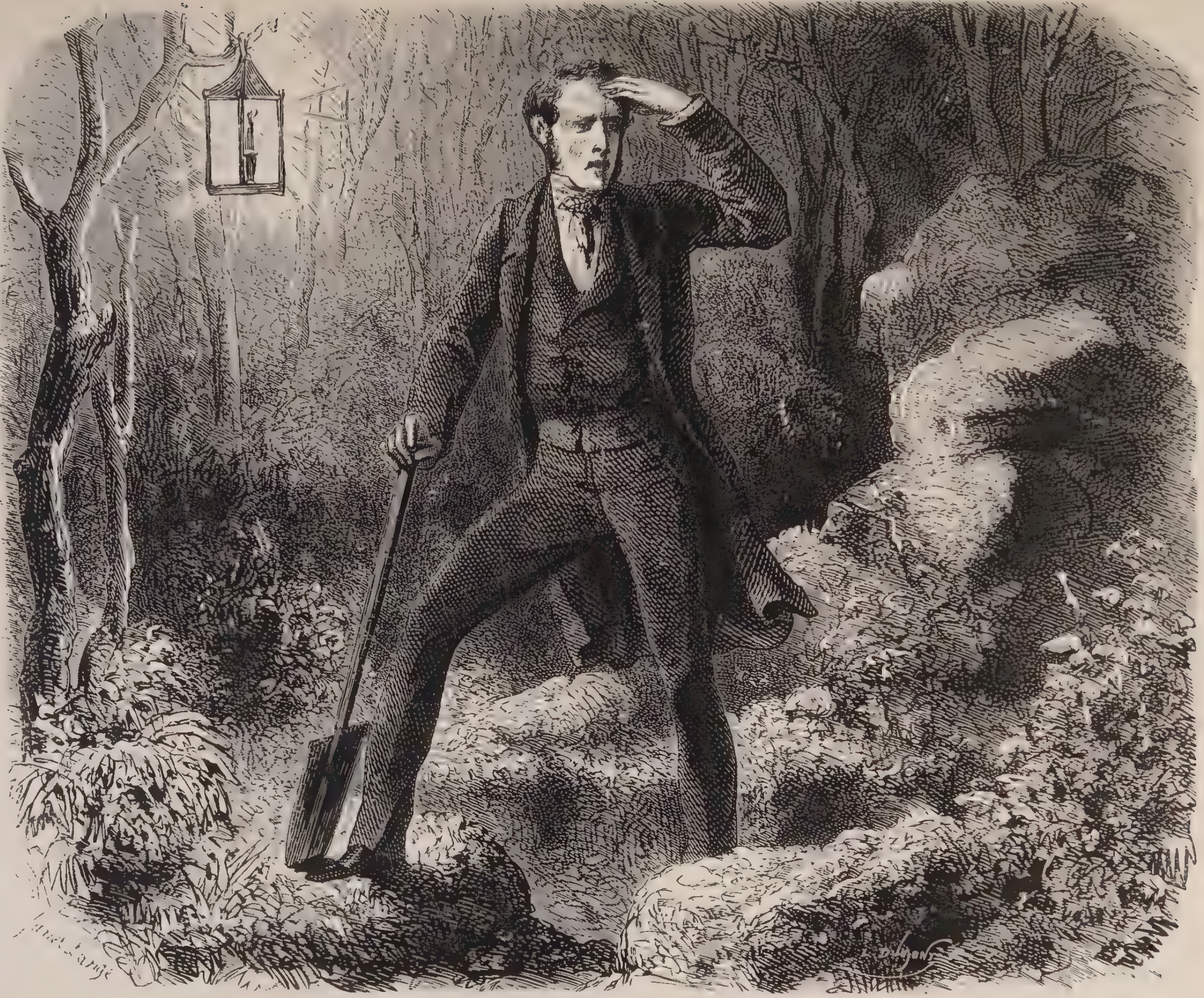
Madame Danglars uttered a piercing cry, and, seizing Villefort's hands, exclaimed:

"My child was alive!" —— "you buried my child alive! You were not certain my child was dead, and you buried it. Ah ——"

Madame Danglars had risen and stood before the *procureur*, whose hands she wrung in her feeble grasp.

"I know not; I merely say this, as I might say anything else," replied Villefort, with a look so fixed, it indicated that this powerful mind was on the verge of despair and madness.

"Ah, my child, my poor child!" cried the baroness, falling on her chair, and stifling her sobs in her handkerchief. Villefort, becoming somewhat re-assured, perceived that to avert the maternal storm gathering over his head he must inspire Madame Danglars with the terror he felt.



"THE CHEST NO LONGER THERE!"

"You understand, then, that if that were so," said he, rising in his turn, and approaching the baroness, to speak to her in a lower tone, "we are lost. This child lives, and some one knows it lives — some one is in possession of our secret; and since Monte-Cristo speaks before us of a child disinterred, when that child could not be found, it is he who is in possession of our secret."

"Just God, avenging God!" murmured Madame Danglars.

Villefort's only answer was a species of groan.

"But the child— the child, sir?" repeated the agitated mother.

"How have I searched for him!" replied Villefort, wringing his hands; "how have I called him in my long sleepless nights! How have I longed for royal wealth to purchase a million of secrets from a million of men, and to find mine among them. At last, one day, when, for the hundredth time, I took up my spade, I asked myself again and again what the Corsican could have done with the child. A child encumbers a fugitive; perhaps, on perceiving it was still alive, he had thrown it into the river."

"Impossible!" cried Madame Danglars: "a man may murder another out of revenge, but he would not deliberately drown a child."

"Perhaps," continued Villefort, "he had put it in the foundling-hospital?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried the baroness; "my child is there!"

"I ran to the hospital, and learned that the same night — the night of the 20th of September — a child had been brought there, wrapped in part of a fine linen napkin, purposely torn in half. This portion of the napkin was marked with half a baron's crown, and the letter H."

"Truly, truly," said Madame Danglars, "all my linen is marked thus; Monsieur de Nargonne was a baron, and my name is Hermine. Thank God! my child was not then dead."

"No, it was not dead."

"And you can tell me so without fearing to make me die of joy, sir? Where is the child?"

Villefort shrugged his shoulders.

"Do I know?" said he; "and do you believe that if I knew I would relate to you all its trials and all its adventures as would a dramatist or a novel-writer? Alas! no, I know not. A woman, about six months after, came to claim it with the other half of the napkin. This woman gave all the requisite particulars, and it was intrusted to her."

"But you should have inquired for the woman; you should have traced her."

"And what do you think I did? I feigned a criminal process, and employed all the most acute bloodhounds and skillful agents in search of her. They traced her to Châlons, and there they lost her."

"They lost her?"

"Yes, forever."

Madame Danglars had listened to this recital with a sigh, a tear, or a shriek for every circumstance.

"And this is all?" said she; "and you stopped there?"

"Oh, no!" said Villefort; "I never ceased to search and to inquire. However, the last two or three years I had allowed myself some respite. But now I will begin with more perseverance and fury than ever, since fear urges me, not my conscience."

"But," replied Madame Danglars, "the Count of Monte-Cristo can know nothing, or he would not seek our society as he does."

"Oh, the wickedness of man is very great," said Villefort, "since it surpasses the goodness of God. Did you observe that man's eyes while he was speaking to us?"

"No."

"But have you ever watched him carefully?"

"Doubtless he is capricious, but that is all; one thing alone struck me; of all the exquisite things he placed before us, he touched nothing. I might have suspected he was poisoning us."

"And you see you would have been deceived."

"Yes, doubtless; but believe me, that man has other projects; for that reason I wished to see you, to speak to you, to warn you against every one, but especially against him. Tell me," cried Villefort, fixing his eyes more steadfastly on her than he had ever done before, "did you ever reveal to any one our connection?"

"Never, to any one."

"You understand me?" replied Villefort affectionately; "when I say any one — pardon my urgency — in the world."

"Yes, yes, I understand very well," ejaculated the baroness; "never, I swear to you."

"Were you ever in the habit of writing in the evening what had transpired in the morning? Do you keep a diary?"

"No! my life has been passed in frivolity; I wish to forget it myself."

"Do you talk in your sleep?"

"I sleep like a child; do you not remember?"

The color mounted to the baroness's face, and Villefort turned awfully pale.

"It is true," said he, in so low a tone that he could hardly be heard.

"Well?" said the baroness.

"Well, I understand what I now have to do," replied Villefort. "In less than one week from this time I will ascertain who this M. de

Monte-Cristo is, whence he comes, where he goes, and why he speaks in our presence of children which have been disinterred in a garden."

Villefort pronounced these words with an accent which would have made the count shudder had he heard him. Then he pressed the hand the baroness reluctantly gave him, and led her respectfully back to the door. Madame Danglars returned in another hackney-coach to the Passage, on the other side of which she found her carriage, and her coachman sleeping peacefully on his box while waiting for her.

CHAPTER LXVIII

A SUMMER BALL

THE same day, during the interview of Madame Danglars with the *procureur du roi*, a traveling-carriage entered the Rue du Helder, passed through the gate-way of No. 27, and stopped in the yard. In a moment the door was opened, and Madame de Morcerf alighted, leaning on her son's arm. Albert soon left her, ordered his horses, and having arranged his toilet, drove to the Champs Elysées, to the house of Monte-Cristo.

The count received him with his habitual smile. It was a strange thing that no one ever appeared to advance a step in that man's favor. Those who would, as it were, force a passage to his heart, found an impassable barrier. Morcerf, who ran toward him with open arms, was chilled as he drew near, in spite of the friendly smile, and simply held out his hand. Monte-Cristo shook it coldly, according to his invariable practice.

"Here I am, dear count."

"Welcome home again."

"I arrived an hour since."

"From Dieppe?"

"No, from Tréport. And I am directly come to see you."

"That is extremely kind of you," said Monte-Cristo, with a tone of perfect indifference.

"And what is the news?"

"You should not ask a stranger for news."

"I know it, but in asking for news, I mean, have you done anything for me?"

"Had you commissioned me?" said Monte-Cristo, playing with his anxiety.

"Come, come," said Albert, "do not assume so much indifference. It is said sympathy travels rapidly; and when at Tréport, I felt the electric shock; you have either been working for me or thinking of me."

"Possibly," said Monte-Cristo, "I have indeed thought of you; but the magnetic wire I was guiding acted, indeed, without my knowledge."

Champs Elysées.

"Indeed! pray tell me how it happened?"

"Willingly. M. Danglars dined with me."

"I know it; to avoid meeting him, my mother and I left town."

"But he met here M. Andrea Cavalcanti."

"Your Italian prince?"

"Not so fast; M. Andrea only calls himself count."

"Calls himself, do you say?"

"Yes, calls himself."

"Is he not a count?"

"What can I know of him? He calls himself so. I, of course, give him the same title, and every one else does the same."

"What a strange man you are! What next? You say M. Danglars dined here?"

"Yes, with Count Cavalcanti, the marquis his father, Mme. Danglars, M. and Mme. de Villefort, charming people, M. Debray, Maximilian Morrel, and M. Château-Renaud."

"Did they speak of me?"

"Not a word."

"So much the worse."

"Why so? I thought you wished them to forget you?"

"If they did not speak of me, I am sure they thought about me, and I am in despair."

"How will that affect you, since Mademoiselle Danglars was not among the number here who thought of you? Truly, she might have thought of you at home."

"I have no fear of that; or, if she did, it was only in the same way in which I think of her."

"Touching sympathy! so you hate each other?" said the count.

"Listen!" said Morcerf — "if Mademoiselle Danglars were disposed to take pity on my supposed martyrdom on her account, and would dispense with all matrimonial formalities between our two families, I am ready to agree to the arrangement. In a word, Mademoiselle Danglars would make a charming mistress — but a wife, *diable!*"

"And this," said Monte-Cristo, "is your opinion of your intended spouse?"

"Yes; it is rather unkind, I acknowledge, but it is true. But as this dream cannot be realized, since Mademoiselle Danglars must become my lawful wife, live perpetually with me, sing to me, compose verses and music within ten paces of me, and that for my whole life, it frightens me. One may forsake a mistress, but a wife, good heavens! is a very different affair. There she must always be; and to have Mademoiselle Danglars always there would be awful."

"You are difficult to please, viscount."

"Yes, for I often wish for what is impossible."

"What is that?"

"To find such a wife as my father found."

Monte-Cristo turned pale, and looked at Albert, while playing with some magnificent pistols.

"Your father was fortunate, then?" said he.

"You know my opinion of my mother, count—an angel of heaven—look at her, still beautiful, witty, better than ever. For any other son to have accompanied his mother four days at Tréport would have been a complaisance or task; while I return after four days' *tête-à-tête* with her more contented, more peaceful—shall I say more poetic?—than if I had taken Queen Mab or Titania as my companion."

Tréport.

"That is an overwhelming perfection, and you would make every one vow to live a single life."

"Such are my reasons, knowing that a perfect woman does not exist, for not liking to marry Mademoiselle Danglars. Have you ever noticed how much a thing is heightened in value when we obtain possession of it? The diamond which glittered in the window of Marlé or of Fossin shines with more splendor when it is our own; but if we are compelled to acknowledge the superiority of another, and still must retain the one that is inferior, do you understand what must be the suffering?"

"Worldling!" murmured the count.

"Thus I shall rejoice when Mademoiselle Eugénie perceives I am but a pitiful atom, with scarcely as many hundred thousand francs as she has millions." Monte-Cristo smiled. "One plan occurred to me," continued Albert; "Franz likes all that is eccentric; I tried to make him fall in love with Mademoiselle Danglars; but in spite of four letters written in the most alluring style, he invariably answered: 'My eccentricity may be great, but it will not make me break my promise.'"

"That is what I call devoted friendship, to recommend to another one whom you would not marry yourself." Albert smiled.

"Apropos," continued he, "Franz is coming soon, but it will not interest you; you dislike him, I think?"

"I?" said Monte-Cristo. "My dear viscount, how have you discovered that I did not like M. Franz? I like every one."

"And you include me in every one—many thanks!"

"Let us not mistake," said Monte-Cristo; "I love every one as God commands us to love our neighbor, as Christians; but I thoroughly hate but a few. Let us return to M. Franz d'Epinay. Did you say he was coming?"

"Yes; summoned by M. de Villefort, who is apparently as anxious to get Mademoiselle Valentine married as M. Danglars is to see Mademoiselle Eugénie settled. It must be a very irksome office to be the father of a grown-up daughter; it seems to make them feverish, and to raise their pulse to ninety degrees until they get rid of them."

"But M. d'Epinay, unlike you, bears his misfortune patiently."

"Still more, he talks seriously about the matter, puts on a white cravat, and speaks of his family. He entertains a very high opinion of M. and Mme. de Villefort."

"Which they deserve, do they not?"

"I believe they do. M. de Villefort has always passed for a severe but a just man."

"There is, then, one," said Monte-Cristo, "whom you do not treat like poor Danglars?"

"Because I am not compelled to marry his daughter perhaps," replied Albert, laughing.

"Indeed, my dear sir," said Monte-Cristo, "you are revoltingly foppish!"

"I foppish! how do you mean?"

"Yes; pray take a cigar, and cease to defend yourself, and to struggle to escape marrying Mademoiselle Danglars. Let things take their course; perhaps you may not have to retract."

"Bah!" said Albert, staring.

"Doubtless, M. le Vicomte, you will not be taken by force; and seriously," continued Monte-Cristo, with a change of voice, "do you wish to break off your engagement?"

"I would give a hundred thousand francs to be able to do so."

"Then make yourself quite happy; M. Danglars would give double that sum to attain the same end."

"Am I indeed so happy?" said Albert, who still could not prevent an almost imperceptible cloud passing across his brow. "But, my dear count, has M. Danglars any reason?"

"Ah! there is your proud and selfish nature. You would expose the self-love of another with a hatchet, but you shrink if your own is attacked with a needle."

"But yet, M. Danglars appeared ——"

"Delighted with you, was he not? Well, he is a man of bad taste, and is still more enchanted with another. I know not whom; study and judge for yourself."

"Thank you, I understand. But my mother — no, not my mother, I mistake — my father intends giving a ball."

"A ball at this season?"

"Summer balls are fashionable."

"If they were not, the countess has only to wish it, and they would become so."

"You are right; you know they are very select balls; those who remain in Paris in July must be true Parisians. Will you take charge of our invitation to Messieurs Cavalcanti?"

"When will it take place?"

"On Saturday."

"M. Cavalcanti's father will be gone."

"But the son will be here: will you invite young M. Cavalcanti?"

"I do not know him, viscount."

"You do not know him?"

"No; I have never seen him till a few days since, and am not responsible for him."

"But you receive him at your house?"

"That is another thing; he was recommended to me by a good abbé, who may be deceived. Give him a direct invitation, but do not ask me to present him; if he were afterward to marry Mademoiselle Danglars, you would accuse me of intrigue, and would be challenging me; besides, I may not be there myself."

"Why should you not be there?"

"Because you have not yet invited me."

"But I come expressly for that purpose."

"You are very kind, but I may be prevented."

"If I tell you one thing, you will be so amiable as to set aside all impediments. My mother begs you to come."

"The Countess de Morcerf?" said Monte-Cristo, starting.

"Ah, count," said Albert, "I assure you Madame de Morcerf speaks freely to me, and if you have not felt those sympathetic fibers of which I spoke just now thrill within you, you must be entirely devoid of them, for during the last four days we have spoken of no one else."

"You have talked of me?"

"Yes, that is your privilege, being a living problem!"

"Then I am also a problem to your mother! I should have thought her too reasonable to be led by imagination."

"A problem, my dear count, for every one — for my mother as well as others; much studied, but not solved, you still remain an enigma, do not fear. My mother is only astonished that you remain so long unresolved. I believe, while the Countess G—— takes you for Lord Ruthven, my mother imagines you to be Cagliostro or Count St. Germain. The first opportunity you have, confirm her in her opinion; it will be easy for you, as you have the philosopher's stone of the one and the wit of the other."

"I thank you for the warning," said the count; "I shall endeavor to be prepared for all suppositions."

"You will, then, come on Saturday?"

"Yes, since Madame de Morcerf invites me."

"You are very kind."

"Will M. Danglars be there?"

"He has already been invited by my father. We shall try to persuade the great d'Aguesseau, M. de Villefort, to come, but have not much hope of seeing him."

"'Never despair,' says the proverb."

"Do you dance, count?"

"I dance?"

"Yes, you; it would not be astonishing."

"That is very well before one is above forty. No, I do not dance, but I like to see others. Does Madame de Morcerf dance?"

"Never; you can talk to her, she so delights in your conversation, and I assure you, you are the only man of whom I have heard her speak with interest." Albert rose and took his hat; the count conducted him to the door.

The Palais de Justice.

"I have one thing to reproach myself with," said he, stopping Albert on the steps. "I have spoken to you indiscreetly about Danglars."

"On the contrary, speak to me always in the same strain about him."

"That is enough. Apropos, when do you expect M. d'Epinay?"

"Five or six days hence at the latest."

"And when is he to be married?"

"Immediately on the arrival of M. and Mme. de St. Méran."

"Bring him to see me. Although you say I do not like him, I assure you I shall be happy to see him."

"I will obey your orders."

"Good-bye."

"Until Saturday, when I may expect you, may I not?"

"Yes, I promised you." The count watched Albert, waving his hand to him.

When he had mounted his phaeton, Monte-Cristo turned, and seeing Bertuccio,—"What news?" said he.

"She went to the Palais," replied the steward.

"Did she stay long there?"

"An hour and a half."

"Did she return home?"

"Directly."

"Well, my dear Bertuccio," said the count, "I now advise you to go in quest of the little estate I spoke to you of in Normandy." Bertuccio bowed, and as his wishes were in perfect harmony with the order he had received, he started the same evening.

CHAPTER LXIX

THE INQUIRY

VILLEFORT kept the promise he had made to Madame Danglars to endeavor to find out how the Count of Monte-Cristo had discovered the history of the house of Auteuil. He wrote the same day to M. de Boville, who, from his having been an inspector of prisons, was promoted to a high office in the police, for the information he acquired; and the latter begged two days to ascertain exactly who would be most likely to give him full particulars. At the end of the second day, Villefort received the following note:

"The person called M. le Comte de Monte-Cristo is an intimate acquaintance of Lord Wilmore, a rich foreigner, who is sometimes seen in Paris, and who is there at this moment; he is also known to the Abbé Busoni, a Sicilian priest, of high repute in the East, where he has done much good."

Villefort replied by ordering the strictest inquiries to be made respecting these two persons; his orders were executed, and the following evening he received these details:

"The abbé, who was in Paris for a month, inhabited a small house behind St. Sulpice, composed of one single story over the ground-floor: two rooms were on each floor, and he was the only tenant. The two lower rooms consisted of a dining-room, with a table, chairs, and side-board of walnut-tree, and a wainscoted parlor, painted white, without ornaments, carpet, or time-piece. It was evident the abbé limited himself to objects of strict necessity. It was true the abbé preferred the sitting-room upstairs, which, being furnished with theological books and parchments, in which he delighted to bury himself during whole months, as his valet said, was more a library than a parlor. His valet looked at the visitors through a sort of wicket, and if their countenance was unknown to him or displeased him, he replied that M. l'Abbé was not in Paris, an answer which satisfied most persons, because the abbé was known to be a great traveler, and absent for long periods. Besides, whether at home or not, whether in Paris or Cairo, the abbé always left something to give away, which the valet distributed through this wicket in his master's name. The other room near the library was a bedroom. A bed without curtains, four arm-chairs, and a couch, covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, composed, with a *prie-Dieu*, all its furniture.

"Lord Wilmore resided in Rue Fontaine-Saint-George. He was one of those English tourists who consume their whole fortune in traveling. He hired the apartment in which he lived furnished, passed only a few hours in the day there, and rarely slept there. One of his peculiarities was never to speak a word of French, which he, however, wrote with great purity."

The day after these important particulars had been furnished to M. *le Procureur*, a man alighted from a carriage at the corner of the Rue Férou, and rapping at an olive-green door, asked if the Abbé Busoni were within.

"No, he went out early this morning," replied the valet.

"I might not always be contented with that answer," replied the visitor, "for I come from one to whom every one must be at home. But have the kindness to give the Abbé Busoni ——"

"I told you he was not at home!" repeated the valet.

"Then, on his return give him that card and this sealed paper. Will he be at home at eight o'clock this evening?"

"Doubtless, unless he is at work, which is the same as if he were out."

"I will come again at that time," replied the visitor, who then retired.

At the appointed hour the same man returned in the same carriage, which, instead of stopping this time at the end of the Rue Férou, drove up to the green door. He knocked, and it was opened immediately to admit him. From the signs of respect the valet paid him, he saw his note had produced a good effect.

"Is the abbé at home?" asked he.

"Yes; he is at work in his library, but he expects you, sir," replied the valet. The stranger ascended a rough staircase, and before a table, whose surface was illumined by a lamp, of which the light was concentrated by a large shade, whilst the rest of the apartment was in darkness, he perceived the abbé in a monk's dress, with a cowl on his head such as was used by learned men of the middle age.

"Have I the honor of addressing the Abbé Busoni?" asked the visitor.

"Yes, sir," replied the abbé; "and you are the person whom M. de Boville, formerly an inspector of prisons, sends to me from the prefect of police?"

"Exactly, sir."

"One of the agents appointed to secure the safety of Paris?"

"Yes, sir," replied the stranger, with a slight hesitation, and blushing.

The abbé replaced the large spectacles, which covered, not only his eyes, but his temples, and sitting down, motioned to his visitor to do the same. "I am at your service, sir," said the abbé, with a marked Italian accent.

"The mission with which I am charged, sir," replied the visitor, speaking with hesitation, "is a confidential one on the part of him who fulfills it, and him by whom he is employed." The abbé bowed. "Your probity," replied the stranger, "is so well known to the prefect, that he wishes, as a magistrate, to ascertain from you some particulars connected with the public safety; to ascertain which I am deputed to see you. It is hoped that no ties of friendship or personal consideration will induce you to conceal the truth from justice."

"Provided, sir, the particulars you wish for do not interfere with my scruples or my conscience. I am a priest, sir, and the secrets of confession, for instance, must remain between me and the justice of God, and not between me and human justice."

"Do not alarm yourself, M. l'Abbé, we will duly respect your conscience."

At this moment the abbé pressed down his side of the shade, which raised it on the other, and threw a bright light on the face of the stranger, while his own remained obscured.

"Excuse me, abbé," said the envoy of the prefect of police, "but the light tries my eyes very much." The abbé lowered the green shade.

"Now, sir, I am listening—speak!"

"I will come at once to the point. Do you know the Count of Monte-Cristo?"

"You mean M. Zaccone, I presume?"

"Zaccone!—is not his name Monte-Cristo?"

"Monte-Cristo is the name of an estate, or, rather, of a rock, and not a family name."

"Well, be it so—let us not dispute about words; and since M. de Monte-Cristo and M. Zaccone are the same ——"

"Absolutely the same."

"Let us speak of M. Zaccone."

"Agreed."

"I asked you if you knew him?"

"Extremely well."

"Who is he?"

"The son of a rich ship-builder in Malta."

"I know that is the report; but, as you are aware, the police does not content itself with vague reports."

"However," replied the abbé, with an affable smile, "when that report is in accordance with the truth, everybody must believe it, the police as well as all the rest."

"Are you sure of what you assert?"

"What do you mean by that question?"

"Understand, sir, I do not in the least suspect your good faith; I ask you are you certain of it?"

"I knew his father, M. Zaccone, and when a child I often played with the son in the timber-yards."

"But whence does he derive the title of count?"

"You are aware that may be bought."

"In Italy?"

"Everywhere."

"And his immense riches, as they are called?"

"As regards that," replied the abbé, "immense is the word used!"

"How much do you suppose he possesses?"

"From one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand livres per annum."

"This is reasonable," said the visitor; "I have heard he had three or four millions."

"Two hundred thousand per annum would make four millions of capital."

"But I was told he had four millions per annum?"

"That is not probable."

"Do you know this island of Monte-Cristo?"

"Certainly; every one who has returned from Palermo, from Naples, or from Rome to France, by sea, must know it, since he has passed close to it, and must have seen it."

"I am told it is a delightful place?"

"It is a rock."

"And why has the count bought a rock?"

"For the sake of being a count. In Italy one must have a county to be a count."

"You have, doubtless, heard the adventures of M. Zaccone's youth?"

"The father's?"

"No, the son's."

"I know nothing certain; at that period of his life, I lost sight of my young comrade."

"Was he in the army?"

"I think he entered the service."

"In what force?"

"In the navy."

"Are you not his confessor?"

"No, sir; I believe he is a Lutheran."

"A Lutheran?"

"I say, I believe such is the case, I do not affirm it; besides, liberty of conscience is established in France."

"Doubtless, and we are not now inquiring into his creed, but his actions; in the name of the prefect of police, I demand, what do you know of him?"

"He passes for a charitable man. Our holy father, the pope, has made him a knight of Jesus Christ for the services he rendered to the

MONTE-CRISTO IN HIS STUDY AT AUTEUIL.

Christians in the East; he has five or six orders, testimonials of his services to princes or states."

"Does he wear them?"

"No, but he is proud of them; he is better pleased with rewards given to the benefactors of man than to his destroyers."

"He is a Quaker then?"

"Exactly, he is a Quaker, with the exception of the peculiar dress."

"Has he any friends?"

"Yes, every one who knows him is his friend."

"But has he any enemies?"

"One only."

"What is his name?"

"Lord Wilmore."

"Where is he?"

"He is in Paris just now."

"Can he give me any particulars?"

"Important ones; he was in India with Zaccone."

"Do you know his abode?"

"It is somewhere in le Chaussée d'Antin; but I know neither the street nor the number."

"Are you at variance with the Englishman?"

"I love Zaccone, and he hates him; we are consequently not friends."

"Do you think the Count of Monte-Cristo had ever been in France before he made this visit to Paris?"

"To that question I can answer positively; no, sir, he had never been, because he applied to me six months since for the particulars he required; and as I knew not when I might again come to Paris, I recommended M. Cavalcanti to him."

"Andrea?"

"No, Bartolomeo, his father."

"Now, sir, I have but one question more to ask, and I charge you, in the name of honor, of humanity, and of religion, to answer me candidly."

"What is it, sir?"

"Do you know with what design M. de Monte-Cristo purchased a house at Auteuil?"

"Certainly, for he told me."

"What is it, sir?"

"To make a lunatic asylum of it, similar to that founded by the Count of Pisani at Palermo: do you know that edifice?"

"I have heard of it."

"It is a magnificent institution." Having said this, the abbé bowed to imply he wished to pursue his studies.

The visitor either understood the abbé's meaning, or had no more questions to ask; he rose, and the abbé accompanied him to the door.

"You are a great almsgiver," said the visitor, "and although you are said to be rich, I will venture to offer you something for your poor people; will you accept my offering?"

"I thank you, sir; I am only jealous of one thing,—namely, that the relief I give should be entirely from my own resources."

"However ——"

"My resolution, sir, is unchangeable; however, you have only to search for yourself, and you will find, alas! but too many objects upon whom to exercise your benevolence."

The abbé once more bowed as he opened the door, the stranger bowed and took his leave; and the carriage conducted him straight to the house of Villefort. An hour afterward the carriage was again ordered, and this time it went to the Rue Fontaine-Saint-George, and stopped at No. 5, where Lord Wilmore lived. The stranger had written to Lord Wilmore, requesting an interview, which the latter had fixed for ten o'clock. As the envoy of the prefect of police arrived ten minutes before ten, he was told that Lord Wilmore, who was precision and punctuality personified, was not yet come in, but that he would be sure to return as the clock struck.

The visitor was introduced into the drawing-room, which was like all other furnished drawing-rooms. A mantel-piece, with two modern Sèvres vases, a time-piece representing Cupid with his bent bow, a looking-glass with an engraving on each side,—one representing Homer carrying his guide; the other, Belisarius begging,—a grayish paper, red and black tapestry — such was Lord Wilmore's drawing-room.

It was illuminated by lamps, with ground-glass shades, which gave only a feeble light, as if out of consideration for the envoy's weak sight. After ten minutes' expectation the clock struck ten; at the fifth stroke the door opened, and Lord Wilmore appeared. He was rather above the middle height, with thin reddish whiskers, light complexion and light hair, turning rather gray. He was dressed with all the English peculiarity,—namely, in a blue coat, with gilt buttons and high collar, in the fashion of 1811, a white casimere waistcoat, and nankeen pantaloons, three inches too short, but which were prevented by straps from slipping up to the knee. His first remark on entering was,—"You know, sir, I do not speak French?"

"I know you do not like to converse in our language," replied the envoy.

"But you may use it," replied Lord Wilmore; "I understand it."

"And I," replied the visitor, changing his idiom, "know enough of English to keep up the conversation. Do not put yourself to the slightest inconvenience."

"Heigho!" said Lord Wilmore, with that tone which is only known to natives of Great Britain.

The envoy presented his letter of introduction, which the latter read with English coolness; and having finished,—

"I understand," said he, "perfectly."

Then began the questions, which were similar to those which had been addressed to the Abbé Busoni. But as Lord Wilmore, in the character of the count's enemy, was less restrained in his answers, they were more numerous; he described the youth of Monte-Cristo, who, he said, at ten years of age entered the service of one of those petty sovereigns of India who make war on the English; it was there Wilmore had first met him and fought against him; in that war Zaccone had been taken prisoner, sent to England, sent to the hulks, whence he had escaped by swimming. Then began his travels, his duels, his passions; then came the insurrection of Greece, and he had served in the Grecian ranks. While in that service he had discovered a silver mine in the mountains of Thessaly, but he had been careful to conceal it from every one. After the battle of Navarino, when the Greek government was consolidated, he asked of King Otho a mining grant for that district, which was given him. Hence that immense fortune, which might, in Lord Wilmore's opinion, amount to one or two millions per annum, a precarious fortune, however, which might be momentarily lost by the failure of the mine.

"But," asked the visitor, "do you know why he came to France?"

"He is speculating in railways," said Lord Wilmore; "and being a clever theorist, he has discovered a new telegraph, which he is seeking to bring to perfection."

"How much does he spend yearly?" was next asked.

"Not more than five or six hundred thousand francs," said Lord Wilmore; "he is a miser." Hatred evidently inspired the Englishman, who, knowing no other reproach to bring on the count, accused him of avarice.

"Do you know his house at Auteuil?"

"Certainly."

"What do you know respecting it?"

"Do you wish to know why he bought it?"

"Yes."

"The count is a speculator, who will certainly ruin himself in experiments. He supposes there is in the neighborhood of the house he has bought a mineral spring equal to those at Bagnères, Luchon, and Cauterets. He is going to turn his house into a *bad-haus*, as the Germans term it. He has already dug up all the garden two or three times, to find the famous spring, and, being unsuccessful, he will soon purchase all the contiguous houses. Now, as I dislike him, and hope his railway, his electric telegraph, or his search for baths will ruin him, I am watching for his discomfiture, which must soon take place."

"What was the cause of your quarrel?"

"When in England he seduced the wife of one of my friends."

"Why do you not seek revenge?"

"I have already fought three duels with him," said the Englishman,—"the first with the pistol, the second with the rapier, and the third with the saber."

"And what was the result of those duels?"

"The first time, he broke my arm; the second, he wounded me in the breast; and the third time, made this large wound." The Englishman turned down his shirt-collar and showed a scar, whose redness proved it to be a recent one. "So that, you see, there is a deadly feud between us."

"But," said the envoy, "you do not go the way to kill him, if I understand aright."

"Well!" said the Englishman, "I practice shooting every day, and every day Grisier comes to my house."

This was all the visitor wished to ascertain, or, rather, all the Englishman appeared to know. The agent rose, and having bowed to Lord Wilmore, who returned his salutation with the stiff politeness of the English, he retired. Lord Wilmore, having heard the door close after him, returned to his bedroom, where with one hand he pulled off his light hair, his red whiskers, his false jaw, and his wound, to resume his own black hair, the dark complexion, and the pearly teeth of the Count of Monte-Cristo.

It was Villefort, and not the messenger of the prefect, who returned to the house of Villefort. The *procureur du roi* felt more at ease after these two visits, although he had learned nothing really satisfactory, yet had learned nothing disquieting. Hence, for the first time since the dinner-party at Auteuil, he slept the following night with some degree of tranquillity.

CHAPTER LXX

THE BALL

IT was in the warmest days of July, when, in due course of time, the Saturday arrived upon which the ball of M. de Morcerf was to take place. It was ten o'clock at night; the large trees in the garden of the count's hotel stood out clear against the azure heaven, studded with golden stars, where the last mists of a storm, which had threatened all day, yet glided.

From the apartments on the ground floor might be heard the sound of music, with the whirl of the waltz and galop, while brilliant streams of light shone through the openings of the Venetian blinds. At this moment the garden was occupied by about ten servants, who had just received orders from their mistress to prepare the supper, the fineness of the weather continuing to increase. Until now, it had been undecided whether the supper should take place in the dining-room, or under a long tent erected on the lawn; but the beautiful blue sky, covered with stars, had determined the case in favor of the lawn and the tent.

The gardens were illuminated with colored lanterns, according to the Italian custom, and, as usual in those countries where the luxury of the table, the rarest of all luxuries, is well understood, the supper-table was loaded with wax-lights and flowers.

At the time the Countess de Morcerf returned to the rooms, after giving her orders, many guests were arriving, more attracted by the charming hospitality of the countess than by the distinguished position of the count; for, owing to the good taste of Mercédès, one was sure of finding some arrangements at her fête worthy of relating, or even copying in case of need.

Madame Danglars, in whom the events we have related had caused deep anxiety, had hesitated in going to Madame de Morcerf's, when, during the morning, her carriage happened to cross that of Villefort.

The latter made a sign, and, the carriages having drawn close together, he said, "You are going to Madame de Morcerf's, are you not?"

"No," replied Madame Danglars, "I am too ill."

"You are wrong," replied Villefort, significantly; "it is important that you should be seen there."

"Do you think so?" demanded the baroness.

"I do."

"In that case I will go." And the two carriages passed on toward their different destinations.

Madame Danglars therefore came, not only beautiful in person, but radiant with splendor; she entered by one door at the same time Mercédès appeared at the other. The countess took Albert to meet Madame Danglars. He approached, paid her some well-merited compliments on her toilet, and offered his arm to conduct her to a seat. Albert looked around him.

"You are looking for my daughter?" said the baroness smiling.

"I confess it," replied Albert. "Could you have been so cruel as not to bring her?"

"Calm yourself. She has met Mademoiselle de Villefort, and has taken her arm; see, they are following us, both in white dresses, one with a bouquet of camellias, the other with one of myosotis. But tell me ——"

"Well, what do you wish to know?"

"Will not the Count of Monte-Cristo be here to-night?"

"Seventeen!" replied Albert.

"What do you mean?"

"I only mean that the count seems the rage," replied the viscount, smiling, "and that you are the seventeenth person that has asked me the same question. The count is in fashion; I congratulate him upon it."

"And have you replied to every one as you have to me?"

"Ah! to be sure, I have not answered you; be satisfied, we shall have this 'lion'; we are among the privileged ones."

"Were you at the Opera yesterday?"

"No."

"He was there."

"Ah, indeed! And did the eccentric person commit any new originality."

"Can he be seen without doing so? Elssler was dancing in *le Diable Boîteux;* the Greek princess was in ecstasies. After the cachúcha he placed a magnificent ring on the stem of a bouquet, and threw it to the charming *danseuse*, who, in the third act, to do honor to the gift, re-appeared with it on her finger. And the Greek princess, will she be here?"

"No, you will be deprived of that pleasure; her position in the count's establishment is not sufficiently understood."

"Now, leave me here, and go and speak to Madame de Villefort, who is longing to engage your attention."

Albert bowed to Madame Danglars, and advanced toward Madame de Villefort, whose lips opened as he approached.

"I wager anything," said Albert, interrupting her, "that I know what you were about to say."

"Well, what is it?"

"If I guess rightly, will you confess it."

"Yes."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"You were going to ask me if the Count of Monte-Cristo were arrived, or expected."

"Not at all. It is not of him that I am now thinking. I was going to ask you if you had received any news of M. Franz?"

"Yes, yesterday."

"What did he tell you?"

"That he was leaving at the same time as his letter."

"Well, now then, the count?"

"The count will come, be satisfied."

"You know that he has another name besides Monte-Cristo?"

"No, I did not know it."

"Monte-Cristo is the name of an island, and he has a family name."

"I never heard it."

"Well, then, I am better informed than you; his name is Zaccone."

"It is possible."

"He is a Maltese."

"That is also possible."

"The son of a shipowner."

"Really, you should relate all this aloud, you would have the greatest success."

"He served in India, discovered a mine in Thessaly, and comes to Paris to form an establishment of mineral waters at Auteuil."

"Well! I'm sure," said Morcerf; "this is indeed news! Am I allowed to repeat it?"

"Yes, but cautiously; tell one thing at a time, and not say I told you."

"Why so?"

"Because it is a secret just discovered."

"By whom?"

"The police."

"Then the news originated ——"

"At the prefect's last night. Paris, you can understand, is astonished at the sight of such unusual splendor, and the police have made inquiries."

"Good! nothing more is wanting than to arrest the count as a vagabond, on the pretext of his being too rich."

"Indeed, this would doubtless have happened if his credentials had not been so favorable."

"Poor count! And is he aware of the danger he has been in?"

"I think not."

"Then it will be but charitable to inform him. When he arrives, I will not fail to do so."

Just then, a handsome young man, with bright eyes, black hair, and glossy mustache, respectfully bowed to Madame de Villefort. Albert extended him his hand.

"Madame," said Albert, "allow me to present to you M. Maximilian Morrel, captain of Spahis, one of our best, and, above all, of our bravest officers."

"I have already had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman at Auteuil, at the house of the Count of Monte-Cristo," replied Madame de Villefort, turning away with marked coldness of manner.

This answer, and, above all, the tone in which it was uttered, chilled the heart of poor Morrel.

But a recompense was in store for him; turning round, he saw near the door a beautiful fair face, whose large blue eyes were, without any marked expression, fixed upon him. while the bouquet of myosotis was gently raised to her lips.

The salutation was so well understood that Morrel, with the same expression in his eyes, placed his handkerchief to his mouth; and these two living statues, whose hearts beat so violently under their marble aspect, separated from each other by the whole length of the room, forgot themselves for a moment, or, rather, forgot the world in their mutual contemplation.

They might have remained much longer lost in one another without any one noticing their abstraction. The Count of Monte-Cristo had just entered. We have already said that there was something factitious or natural in the count which attracted universal attention wherever he appeared. It was not the coat, unexceptionable in its cut, though simple and without a decoration; it was not the plain white waistcoat; it was not the trousers, that displayed the foot so perfectly formed — it was none of these things that attracted the attention; it was his pale complexion, his waving black hair; it was the expression, so calm and serene; it was the eye, so dark and melancholy; it was the mouth, chiseled with such marvelous delicacy, which so easily expressed such high disdain — these were what fixed all eyes upon him.

Many men might have been handsomer, but certainly there could be none whose appearance was more *significant*, if the expression may be used. Everything about the count seemed to have its meaning; for the constant habit of thought which he had acquired had given an ease and vigor to the expression of his face, and even to the most trifling gesture, scarcely to be understood. Yet the Parisian world is so strange, that even all this might not have won attention, had there not been, besides this, a mysterious story, gilded by an immense fortune.

Meanwhile he advanced through the crowd of curious glances and exchange of salutations toward Madame de Morcerf, who, standing before a mantel-piece ornamented with flowers, had seen his entrance in a looking-glass placed opposite the door, and was prepared to receive him.

She turned toward him with a serene smile just at the moment he was bowing to her. No doubt she fancied the count would speak to her, while on his side the count thought she was about to address him; but both remained silent, for to both a few commonplace words, doubtless, seemed unfitting, and after a mere bow, Monte-Cristo directed his steps to Albert, who received him cordially.

"Have you seen my mother?" asked Albert.

"I have just had the pleasure," replied the count, "but I have not seen your father."

"See, he is down there, talking politics with that little group of great geniuses."

"Indeed!" said Monte-Cristo; "and so those gentlemen down there are men of great talent. I should not have guessed it. And for what kind of talent are they celebrated? You know there are different sorts."

"That tall, harsh-looking man is very learned; he discovered, in the neighborhood of Rome, a kind of lizard with a vertebra more than usual, and he immediately laid his discovery before the Institute. The thing was discussed for a long time, but finally decided in his favor. The vertebra made a great noise in the learned world, and the gentleman, who was only a knight of the Legion of Honor, was made an officer."

"Come," said Monte-Cristo, "this cross seems to me to be wisely awarded. I suppose, had he found another additional vertebra, they would have made him a commander."

"Very likely," said Albert.

"And who can that person be who has taken it into his head to wrap himself up in a blue coat embroidered with green?"

"Oh, that coat is not his own idea; it is the Republic's, which, as you know, was not very artistic, and deputed David to draw a uniform for the Academicians."

"Indeed!" said Monte-Cristo; "so this gentleman is an Academician?"

"Within the last week he has been made one of the learned assembly."

"And what is his especial talent?"

"His specialty? I believe he thrusts pins through the heads of rabbits, that he makes fowls eat madder, and that he keeps back the spinal marrow of dogs with whalebone."

"And he is made a member of the Academy of Sciences for this?"

"No; of the French Academy."

"But what has the French Academy to do with all this?"

"I was going to tell you. It seems ——"

"That his experiments have very considerably advanced the cause of science, doubtless?"

"No; that his style of writing is very good."

"This must be very flattering to the feelings of the rabbits into whose heads he has thrust pins, to the fowls whose bones he has dyed red, and to the dogs whose spinal marrow he has kept back?" Albert laughed. "And the other one?" demanded the count.

"Ah! in the dark-blue coat?"

"Yes."

"He is a colleague of the count, and one of the warmest opponents to the Chamber of Peers having a uniform. He was very successful upon that question. He stood badly with the Liberal papers, but his noble opposition to the wishes of the court has recommended him to them. They talk of making him an ambassador."

An Academician.

"And what are his claims to the peerage?"

"He has composed two or three comic operas, written four or five articles in the *Siècle*, and voted five or six years for the minister."

"Bravo, viscount!" said Monte-Cristo, smiling; "you are a delightful cicerone. And now you will do me a favor, will you not?"

"What is it?"

"Do not introduce me to any of these gentlemen; and should they wish it, you will warn me." Just then the count felt his arm pressed. He turned round; it was Danglars.

"Ah! is it you, baron?" said he.

"Why do you call me baron?" said Danglars; "you know that I care nothing for my title. I am not like you, viscount; you like your title, do you not?"

"Certainly," said Albert, "seeing that without my title I should be nothing; while you, sacrificing the baron, would still remain the millionaire."

"Which seems to me the finest title under the royalty of July," replied Danglars.

"Unfortunately," said Monte-Cristo, "one's title to a millionaire does not last for life, like that of baron, peer of France, or academician; for example, the millionaires Frank and Poulmann, of Frankfort, who have just become bankrupts."

"Indeed!" said Danglars, becoming pale.

"Yes; I received the news this evening by a courier. I had about a million in their hands, but, warned in time, I withdrew it a month ago."

"By heavens!" exclaimed Danglars, "they have drawn on me for two hundred thousand francs!"

"Well, I've warned you; their signature is worth five per cent."

"Yes, but it is too late," said Danglars, "I have honored their bills."

"Good," said Monte-Cristo, "here are two hundred thousand francs gone after ——"

"Hush! do not mention these things," said Danglars; then, approaching Monte-Cristo, he added, "especially before young M. Cavalcanti." After which he smiled, and turned toward the young man in question.

Albert had left the count to speak to his mother, Danglars to converse with young Cavalcanti; Monte-Cristo was for an instant alone. Meanwhile the heat became excessive. The footmen were hastening through the rooms with waiters loaded with ices. Monte-Cristo wiped the perspiration from his forehead, but drew back when the waiter was presented to him; he took no refreshment. Madame de Morcerf lost not sight of Monte-Cristo; she saw that he took nothing, and even noticed the movement with which he withdrew from it.

"Albert," she asked, "did you notice that?"

"What, mother?"

"That the count will never accept an invitation to dine with us."

"Yes; but then he breakfasted with me — indeed, he made his first appearance in the world on that occasion."

"But your house is not M. de Morcerf's," murmured Mercédès; "and since he has been here I have watched him."

"Well?"

"Well, he has taken nothing yet."

"The count is very temperate."

Mercédès smiled sadly.

"Go to him," said she, "and the next waiter that passes, insist upon his taking something."

"But why, mother?"

"Oblige me, Albert," said Mercédès. Albert kissed his mother's hand, and drew near to the count. Another salver passed, loaded as the preceding ones; she saw Albert attempt to persuade the count, but he obstinately refused. Albert rejoined his mother; she was very pale.

"Well," said she, "you see he refuses?"

"Yes; but why need this annoy you?"

"You know, Albert, women are singular creatures. I should like to have seen the count take something in my house, if only a morsel of pomegranate. Perhaps he cannot reconcile himself to the French style of living, and might prefer something else."

"Oh, no! I have seen him eat of everything in Italy; no doubt he does not feel inclined this evening."

"And besides," said the countess, "accustomed as he is to burning climates, possibly he does not feel the heat as we do."

"I no not think that, for he has complained of feeling almost suffocated, and asked why the Venetian blinds were not opened as well as the windows."

"In a word," said Mercédès, "it was a way of assuring me that his abstinence was intended." And she left the room.

A minute afterward the blinds were thrown open, and through the jessamine and clematis that overhung the window might be seen the garden ornamented with lanterns, and the supper laid under the tent. Dancers, players, talkers, all uttered an exclamation of joy — every one inhaled with delight the breeze that floated in. At the same time, Mercédès re-appeared, paler than before, but with that composed expression of countenance which she sometimes wore. She went straight to the group of which her husband formed the center.

"Do not detain these gentlemen here, count," she said; "they would prefer, I should think, to breathe in the garden rather than suffocate here, since they are not playing."

"Ah," said a gallant old general, who, in 1809, had sung *Partant pour la Syrie*, "we will not go alone to the garden."

"Then," said Mercédès, "I will lead the way."

Turning toward Monte-Cristo, she added, "Count, will you oblige me with your arm?"

The count almost staggered at these simple words; then he fixed his eyes on Mercédès. It was but the glance of a moment, but it seemed to the countess to have lasted for a century, so much was expressed in that one look. He offered his arm to the countess; she leaned upon it, or rather just touched it with her little hand, and they together descended the steps, lined with rhododendrons and camellias. Behind them, by another outlet, a group of about twenty persons rushed into the garden with loud exclamations of delight.

CHAPTER LXXI

BREAD AND SALT

MADAME DE MORCERF entered the archway of trees with her companion. It was a grove of lindens, conducting to a conservatory. "It was too warm in the room, was it not, count?" she asked.

"Yes, madame; and it was an excellent idea of yours to open the doors and the blinds." As he ceased speaking, the count felt the hand of Mercédès tremble.

"But you," he said, "with that light dress, and without anything to cover you but that gauze scarf, perhaps you feel cold?"

"Do you know where I am leading you?" said the countess, without replying to the question of Monte-Cristo.

"No, madame," replied Monte-Cristo; "but you see I make no resistance."

"We are going to the green-house that you see at the end of this grove."

The count looked at Mercédès as if to interrogate her, but she continued walking in silence; on his side, Monte-Cristo also said nothing. They reached the building, ornamented with magnificent fruits, which ripen even in July in the artificial temperature which takes the place of the sun, so frequently absent in our climate. The countess left the arm of Monte-Cristo, and gathered a bunch of Muscatel grapes.

"See, count," she said, with a smile, so sad in its expression that one could almost see the tears gathering on her eyelids — "see, our French grapes are not to be compared, I know, with yours of Sicily and Cyprus, but you will make allowance for our northern sun." The count bowed but stepped back.

"Do you refuse?" said Mercédès in a tremulous voice.

"Pray excuse me, madame," replied Monte-Cristo, "but I never eat Muscatel grapes."

Mercédès let them fall, and sighed. A magnificent peach was hanging against an adjoining wall, ripened by the same artificial heat. Mercédès drew near, and plucked the fruit.

"Take this peach, then," she said. The count again refused. "What, again!" she exclaimed, in so plaintive an accent that it seemed but to stifle a sob; "really, you pain me." A long silence succeeded this scene; the peach, like the grapes, was rolling on the ground.

"Count," added Mercédès, with a supplicating glance, "there is a beautiful Arabian custom, which makes eternal friends of those who have together eaten bread and salt beneath the same roof."

"I know it, madame," replied the count; "but we are in France, and not in Arabia; and in France eternal friendships are as rare as the custom of dividing bread and salt with one another."

"But," said the countess, breathlessly, with her eyes fixed on Monte-Cristo, whose arm she convulsively pressed with both hands, "we are friends, are we not?"

The count became pale as death, the blood rushed to his heart, and then again rising, dyed his cheeks with crimson; his eyes swam for some seconds like those of a man suddenly dazzled.

"Certainly, we are friends," he replied; "why should we not be such?"

The answer was so little like the one Mercédès desired, that she turned away to give vent to a sigh, which sounded more like a groan. "Thank you," she said. And they recommenced walking. They went the whole length of the garden without uttering a word.

"Sir," suddenly exclaimed the countess, after their walk had continued ten minutes in silence, "is it true that you have seen so much, traveled so far, and suffered so deeply?"

"I have suffered deeply, madame," answered Monte-Cristo.

"But now you are happy?"

"Doubtless," replied the count, "since no one hears me complain."

"And your present happiness, has it softened your heart?"

"My present happiness equals my past misery."

"Are you not married?" asked the countess.

"I, married!" exclaimed Monte-Cristo, shuddering; "who could have told you so?"

"No one told me you were; but you have frequently been seen at the Opera with a young and lovely person."

"She is a slave whom I bought at Constantinople, madame, the daughter of a prince. I have adopted her as my daughter, having no one else to love in the world."

"You live alone, then?"

"I do."

"You have no sister—no son—no father?"

"I have no one."

"How can you exist thus, without any one to attach you to life?"

"It is not my fault, madame. At Malta, I loved a young girl, was on the point of marrying her, when war came and carried me away like a whirlwind. I thought she loved me well enough to wait for me, and even to remain faithful to my grave. When I returned she was married. This is the history of all men who have passed twenty years of

age. Perhaps my heart was weaker than those of the generality, and I suffered more than they would have done in my place. This is all."

The countess stopped for a moment, as if gasping for breath. "Yes," she said, "and you have still preserved this love in your heart—one can only love once—and did you ever see her again?"

"Never!"

"Never?"

"I never returned to the country where she lived."

"At Malta?"

"Yes; at Malta."

"She is, then, now at Malta?"

"I think so."

"And have you forgiven her for all she has made you suffer!"

"Yes, I have pardoned *her*."

"But only her; do you, then, still hate those who separated you?"

"I hate them? not at all; why should I?" The countess placed herself before Monte-Cristo, still holding in her hand a portion of the perfumed grapes.

"Take some," she said.

"Madame, I never eat Muscatel grapes," replied Monte-Cristo, as if the subject had not been mentioned before. The countess dashed the grapes into the nearest thicket with a gesture of despair.

"Inflexible man!" she murmured. Monte-Cristo remained as unmoved as if the reproach had not been addressed to him.

Albert at this moment ran in. "Oh, mother!" he exclaimed, "such a misfortune has happened!"

"What? what has happened?" asked the countess, as though awaking from a sleep to the realities of life; "did you say a misfortune? Indeed, I should expect misfortunes."

"M. de Villefort is here."

"Well?"

"He comes to fetch his wife and daughter."

"Why so?"

"Because Madame de Saint-Méran is just arrived in Paris, bringing the news of M. de Saint-Méran's death, which took place on the first stage after he left Marseilles. Madame de Villefort, who was in very good spirits, would neither believe nor think of the misfortune; but Mademoiselle Valentine, at the first words, guessed the whole truth, notwithstanding all the precautions of her father; the blow struck her like a thunderbolt, and she fell senseless."

"And how was M. de Saint-Méran related to Mademoiselle de Villefort?" said the count.

"He was her grandfather on the mother's side. He was coming here to hasten her marriage with Franz."

"Ah, indeed!"

"A respite for Franz, then! Why, is not M. de Saint-Méran also grandfather to Mademoiselle Danglars?"

"Albert! Albert!" said Madame de Morcerf, in a tone of mild reproof, "what are you saying? Ah! count, he esteems you so highly, tell him that he has spoken amiss."

And she took two or three steps forward. Monte-Cristo watched her with an air so thoughtful, and so full of affectionate admiration, that she returned, taking his hand; at the same time she grasped that of her son, and joined them together.

"We are friends; are we not?" she asked.

"Oh, madame, I do not presume to call myself your friend, but at all times I am your most respectful servant." The countess left with an indescribable pang in her heart, and before she had taken ten steps the count saw her raise her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Do not my mother and you agree?" asked Albert, astonished.

"On the contrary," replied the count, "did you not hear her declare that we were friends?"

They reëntered the drawing-room, which Valentine and Madame de Villefort had just quitted. Monte-Cristo departed almost at the same time.

CHAPTER LXXII

MADAME DE SAINT-MÉRAN

A GLOOMY scene had indeed just passed at the house of Villefort. After the two ladies had departed for the ball, whither all the entreaties of Madame de Villefort had failed in persuading him to accompany them, the *procureur du roi* had, as usual, shut himself up in his study, with a heap of papers calculated to alarm any one else, but which in ordinary times scarcely satisfied his inordinate desires.

But this time the papers were a mere matter of form. Villefort had secluded himself, not to study, but to reflect; and, with the door locked, and orders given that he should not be disturbed, excepting for important business, he sat down in his arm-chair, and began to ponder once more over those events, the remembrance of which had, during the last eight days, filled his mind with so many gloomy thoughts and bitter recollections.

Then, instead of plunging into the mass of papers piled before him, he opened the drawer of his desk, touched a spring, and drew out a parcel of notes, precious documents, amongst which he had carefully arranged, in characters only known to himself, the names of all those who, either in his political career, in money matters, at the bar, or in his mysterious love-affairs, had become his enemies. Their number was formidable, now that he had begun to fear, and yet these names, powerful though they were, had often caused him to smile with the same kind of satisfaction experienced by a traveler who, from the summit of a mountain, beholds at his feet the craggy eminences, the almost impassable paths, and the fearful chasms through which he has so perilously climbed. When he had run over all these names in his memory, again read and studied them, commenting meanwhile upon his lists, he shook his head.

"No!" he murmured, "none of my enemies would have waited so patiently and laboriously for so long a space of time, that they might now come and crush me with this secret. Sometimes, as Hamlet says:

> "'Deeds will rise,
> Tho' all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes';

but, like a phosphoric light, they rise but to mislead. The story has been told by the Corsican to some priest, who, in his turn, has also repeated it. M. de Monte-Cristo may have heard it, and to enlighten himself ——

"But why should he wish to enlighten himself upon the subject?" asked Villefort, after a moment's reflection, "what interest can this Monte-Cristo, M. Zaccone, son of a shipowner of Malta, discoverer of a mine in Thessaly, now visiting Paris for the first time — what interest, I say, can he take in discovering a gloomy, mysterious, and useless fact like this? However, amidst all the incoherent details given to me by the Abbé Busoni and by Lord Wilmore, by that friend and that enemy, one thing appears certain and clear in my opinion: that in no period, in no case, in no circumstance, could there have been any contact between him and me."

But Villefort uttered words which even he himself did not believe. He dreaded not the revelation so much, for he could reply to, or deny its truth; he cared little for that Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, which appeared suddenly in letters of blood upon the wall; but what he was really anxious for was to discover the man whose hand had traced them. While he was endeavoring to calm his fears, and instead of dwelling upon the political future that had so often been the subject of his ambitious dreams, was, in his fear of awakening the enemy that had so long slept, imagining a future of domestic bliss, the noise of a carriage sounded in the yard; then he heard the steps of an aged person ascending the stairs, then tears and lamentations, such as servants always assume when they wish to appear interested in their master's grief.

He drew back the bolt of his door, and almost directly an old lady entered, unannounced, carrying her shawl on her arm, and her bonnet in her hand. The white hair was thrown back from her yellow forehead, and her eyes, already sunken by the furrows of age, now almost disappeared beneath the eyelids so swollen with grief.

"Oh, sir," she said; "oh, sir, what a misfortune! I shall die of it; oh! yes, I shall certainly die of it!"

And then, falling upon the chair nearest the door, she burst into a paroxysm of sobs. The servants, standing in the door-way, not daring to approach nearer, were looking at Noirtier's old servant, who, having heard a noise in his master's room, had run there also, and remained behind the others. Villefort rose, and ran toward his mother-in-law, for it was she.

"Why, what can have happened?" he exclaimed, "what has thus disturbed you? Is M. de Saint-Méran with you?"

"M. de Saint-Méran is dead!" answered the old marchioness, without preface, without expression; she appeared stupefied. Villefort drew back, and clasping his hands together, exclaimed:

"Dead! so suddenly?"

"A week ago," continued Madame de Saint-Méran, "we went out together in the carriage after dinner. M. de Saint-Méran had been unwell for some days; still, the idea of seeing our dear Valentine again inspired him with courage; and, notwithstanding his illness, he would leave; when, at six leagues from Marseilles, after having eaten some of the lozenges he is accustomed to take, he fell into such a deep sleep, that it appeared to me unnatural; still I hesitated to wake him, when I fancied his face became red, and that the veins in his temples throbbed more violently than usual. However, as it became dark, I could no longer see. I fell asleep; soon he uttered a piercing shriek, like a person suffering in his dreams, and suddenly threw his head back. I stopped the postilion, I called M. de Saint-Méran, I applied my smelling-salts; but all was over, and I arrived at Aix by the side of a corpse."

Villefort stood with his mouth half open, quite stupefied.

"Of course, you sent for a doctor?"

"Immediately; but, as I have told you, it was too late."

"Yes; but then he could tell you of what complaint the poor marquis had died."

"Oh, yes, sir, he told me; it appears to have been an apoplectic stroke."

"And what did you do then?"

"M. de Saint-Méran had always expressed a desire, in case of his death happening during his absence from Paris, that his body might be brought to the family vault. I had him put into a leaden coffin, and I am preceding him by a few days."

"Oh! my poor mother!" said Villefort, "to have such duties to perform at your age, after such a blow!"

"God has supported me through all! And then, my dear marquis, he would certainly have done everything for me, all that I have performed for him. It is true that since I left him, I seem to have lost my senses. I cannot cry; at my age they say we have no more tears; still I think that when one is in trouble, we should have the power of weeping.

Where is Valentine, sir? It is on her account I am here; I wish to see Valentine."

Villefort thought it would be terrible to reply that Valentine was at a ball; so he only said that she had gone out with her step-mother, and that she should be fetched. "This instant, sir — this instant, I beseech you!" said the old lady. Villefort placed the arm of Madame de Saint-Méran within his own, and conducted her to his apartment.

"Rest yourself, mother," he said.

The marchioness raised her head at this word, and beholding the man who so forcibly reminded her of her deeply regretted child, who still lived for her in Valentine, she felt touched at the name of mother; and bursting into tears, she fell on her knees before an arm-chair, where she buried her venerable head. Villefort left her to the care of the women, while old Barrois ran, half-scared, to his master; for nothing frightens old men so much as when death relaxes its vigilance over them for a moment in order to strike some other old man. Then, while Madame de Saint-Méran, still on her knees, remained praying fervently, Villefort sent for a hackney-coach, and went himself to fetch his wife and daughter from Madame de Morcerf's. He was so pale when he appeared at the door of the ball-room, that Valentine ran to him, saying—

"Oh, father! some misfortune has happened?"

"Your grandmamma has just arrived, Valentine," said Villefort.

"And grandpapa!" inquired the young girl, trembling with apprehension. Villefort only replied by offering his arm to his daughter. It was just in time, for Valentine's head swam, and she staggered; Madame de Villefort instantly hastened to her assistance, and aided her husband in dragging her to the carriage, saying,—

"What a singular event! Who could have thought it? Ah, yes, it is indeed strange!"

And the wretched family departed, leaving a cloud of sadness hanging over the rest of the evening. At the foot of the stairs, Valentine found Barrois awaiting her.

"M. Noirtier wishes to see you to-night," he said in an undertone.

"Tell him I will come when I leave my dear grandmamma," she replied, feeling, with true delicacy, that the person to whom she could be of the most service just then was Madame de Saint-Méran.

Valentine found her grandmother in bed; silent caresses, heart-wrung sobs, broken sighs, burning tears, were all that passed in this sad interview; while Madame de Villefort, leaning on her husband's arm, maintained all outward forms of respect, at least toward the poor widow. She soon whispered to her husband:

"I think it would be better for me to retire, with your permission, for the sight of me appears still to afflict your mother-in-law." Madame de Saint-Méran heard her.

"Yes, yes," she said, softly, to Valentine, "let her leave; but do you stay."

Madame de Villefort left, and Valentine remained alone beside the bed, for the *procureur du roi*, overcome with astonishment at the unexpected death, had followed his wife. Meanwhile, Barrois had returned for the first time to old Noirtier, who, having heard the noise in the house, had, as we have said, sent his old servant to inquire the cause; on his return his quick and intelligent eye interrogated the messenger.

"Alas, sir!" exclaimed Barrois, "a great misfortune has happened. Madame de Saint-Méran has arrived, and her husband is dead!"

M. de Saint-Méran and Noirtier had never been on strict terms of friendship; still, the death of one old man always considerably affects another. Noirtier let his head fall upon his chest, apparently overwhelmed and thoughtful; then, closing one eye.

Barrois asked, "Mademoiselle Valentine?"

Noirtier nodded his head.

"She is at the ball, as you know, since she came to say good-bye to you in full dress." Noirtier again closed his left eye.

"Do you wish to see her?" Noirtier again made an affirmative sign.

"Well, they have gone to fetch her, no doubt, from Madame de Morcerf's; I will await her return, and beg her to come up here. Is that what you wish for?"

"Yes," replied the invalid.

Barrois, therefore, as we have seen, watched for Valentine, and informed her of her grandfather's wish. Consequently, Valentine came up to Noirtier, on leaving Madame de Saint-Méran, who, in the midst of her grief, had at last yielded to fatigue, and fallen into a feverish sleep. Within reach of her hand they placed a small table, upon which stood a bottle of orangeade, her usual beverage, and a glass. Then, as we have said, the young girl left the bedside to see M. Noirtier.

Valentine kissed the old man, who looked at her with such tenderness that her eyes again filled with tears, whose sources he thought must be exhausted. The old gentleman continued to dwell upon her with the same expression.

"Yes, yes," said Valentine, "you mean that I have yet a kind grandfather left, do you not?" The old man intimated that such was his meaning. "Alas! happily I have," continued Valentine. "Without that, what would become of me?"

It was one o'clock in the morning. Barrois, who wished to go to bed himself, observed that after such sad events every one stood in need of rest. Noirtier would not say that the only rest he needed was to see his child, but wished her good-night, for grief and fatigue had made her appear quite ill.

The next morning she found her grandmother in bed; the fever had not abated; on the contrary, her eyes glistened, and she appeared to be suffering from violent nervous irritability.

"Oh, dear grandmamma! are you worse?" exclaimed Valentine, perceiving all these signs of agitation.

"No, my child, no!" said Madame de Saint-Méran, "but I was impatiently awaiting your arrival, that I might send for your father."

"My father?" inquired Valentine, uneasily.

"Yes! I wish to speak to him."

Valentine durst not oppose her grandmother's wish, the cause of which she knew not, and an instant afterward Villefort entered.

"Sir," said Madame de Saint-Méran, without using any circumlocution, and as if fearing she had no time to lose, "you wrote to me concerning the marriage of this child?"

"Yes, madame," replied Villefort; "it is not only projected, but arranged."

"Your intended son-in-law is named M. Franz d'Epinay?"

"Yes, madame."

"Is he not the son of General d'Epinay, who was on our side, and who was assassinated some days before the usurper returned from the Isle of Elba?"

"The same."

"Does he not dislike the idea of marrying the granddaughter of a Jacobin?"

"Our civil dissensions are now happily extinguished, mother," said Villefort; "M. d'Epinay was quite a child when his father died, he knows very little of M. Noirtier, and will meet him, if not with pleasure, at least with indifference."

"Is it a suitable match?"

"In every respect."

"And the young man?"

"Possesses universal esteem."

"You approve of him?"

"He is one of the most distinguished young men I know."

During the whole of this conversation Valentine had remained silent.

"Well, sir," said Madame de Saint-Méran, after a few minutes' reflection, "I must hasten the marriage, for I have but a short time to live."

"You, madame?"

"You, dear mamma?" exclaimed Villefort and Valentine at the same time.

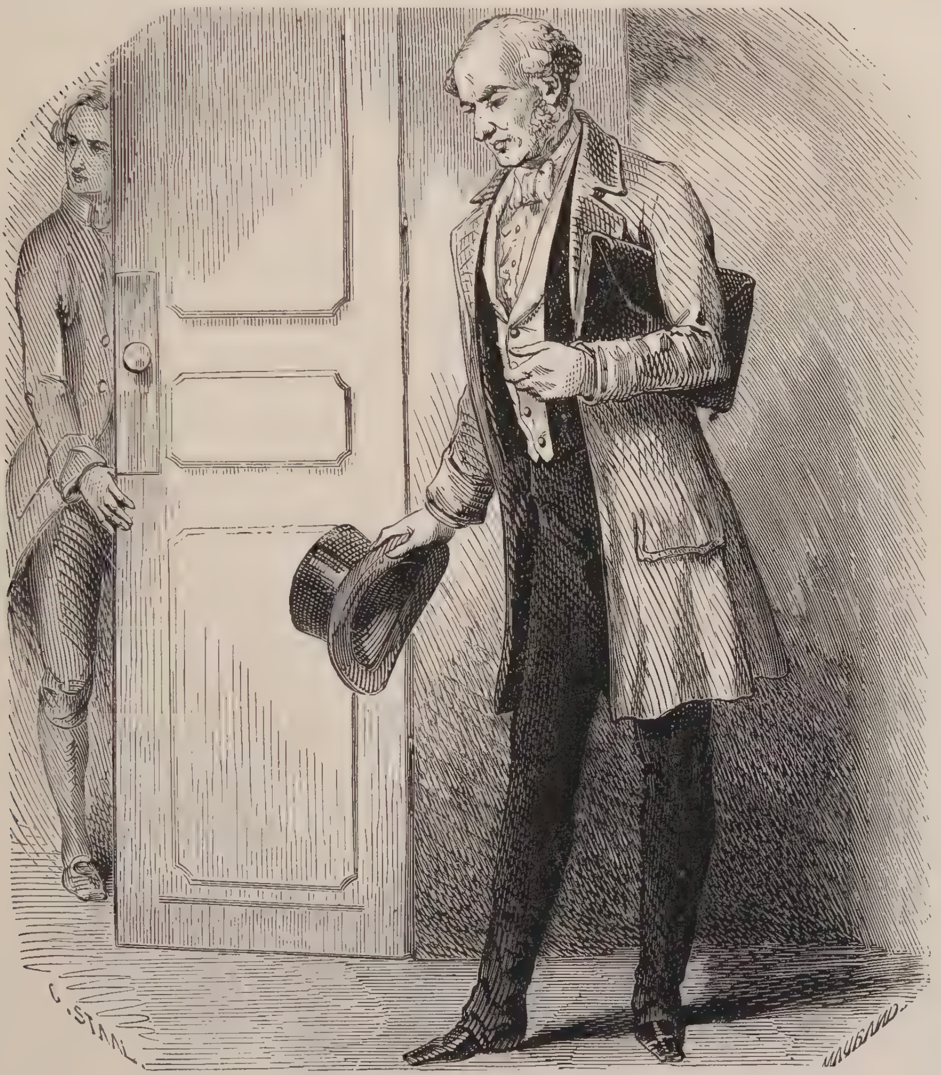
"I know what I am saying," continued the marchioness; "I must hurry you, so that, having no mother, she may at least have a grandmother to bless her marriage. I am all that is left to her belonging to my poor Renée, whom you have so soon forgotten, sir."

"Ah, madame," said Villefort, "you forget that I was obliged to give a mother to my child."

"A step-mother is never a mother, sir. But this is not to the purpose; our business concerns Valentine; let us leave the dead in peace."

All this was said with such exceeding rapidity, that there was something in the conversation that seemed like the commencement of delirium.

"It shall be as you wish, madame," said Villefort; "more especially since your wishes coincide with mine; and as soon as M. d'Epinay arrives in Paris ——"



The Notary.

"My dear mother," interrupted Valentine, "consider decorum — the recent death. You would not have me marry under such sad auspices?"

"My child," exclaimed the old lady, sharply, "let us hear none of those conventional objections that deter weak minds from arranging their future. I also was married at the death-bed of my mother, and certainly I have not been less happy on that account."

"Still that idea of death, madame!" said Villefort.

"Still?—Always! I tell you I am going to die—do you understand? Well, before dying, I wish to see my son-in-law. I wish to tell him to make my child happy; I wish to read in his eyes whether he intends to obey me;—in fact, I will know him—I will!" continued the old lady, with a fearful expression, "that I may rise from the depths of my grave to find him, if he should not fulfill his duty!"

"Madame," said Villefort, "you must lay aside these excited ideas, which almost assume the appearance of madness. The dead, once buried in their graves, rise no more."

"And I tell you, sir, that you are mistaken. This night I have had a fearful sleep. It seemed as though my soul were already hovering over my body; my eyes, which I tried to open, closed against my will; and what will appear impossible above all to you, sir, I saw with my eyes shut, in the spot where you are now standing, issuing from that corner where there is a door leading into Madame Villefort's dressing-room—I saw, I tell you, silently enter, a white figure."

Valentine screamed.

"It was the fever that disturbed you, madame," said Villefort.

"Doubt, if you please, but I am sure of what I say. I saw a white figure; and as if to prevent my discrediting the testimony of only one of my senses, I heard my glass moved—moved, I say; the same, the very same, which is there now on the table."

"Oh! dear mother, it was a dream."

"So little was it a dream, that I stretched my hand toward the bell; but when I did so, the shade disappeared; my maid then entered with a light."

"But you saw no one?"

"Phantoms are visible to those only who ought to see them. It was the soul of my husband?—Well, if my husband's soul can come to me, why should not my soul re-appear to guard my granddaughter? the tie is even more direct, it seems to me."

"Oh! madame," said Villefort, deeply affected, in spite of himself, "do not yield to those gloomy thoughts; you will long live with us, happy, loved, and honored, and we will make you forget——"

"Never, never, never!" said the marchioness. "When does M. d'Epinay return?"

"We expect him every moment."

"It is well. As soon as he arrives, inform me. We must be expeditious. And then I also wish to see a notary, that I may be assured that all our property goes to Valentine."

“I SAW, SILENTLY ENTER, A WHITE FIGURE.”

"Ah, my mother!" murmured Valentine, pressing her lips on the burning brow of her grandmother, "do you wish to kill me? Oh, how feverish you are! we must not send for a notary, but for a doctor?"

"A doctor!" said she, shrugging her shoulders, "I am not ill; I am thirsty — that is all."

"What are you drinking, dear mamma?"

"The same as usual, my dear; my glass is there on the table — give it me, Valentine." Valentine poured the orangeade into a glass, and gave it to her grandmother with a certain degree of dread, for it was the same glass, she fancied, that had been touched by the specter.

The marchioness drained the glass at a single draught, and then turned on her pillow, repeating,

"The notary! the notary!"

Villefort left the room, and Valentine seated herself at the bedside of her grandmother. The poor child appeared herself to require the doctor she had recommended to her aged relative. A burning spot flushed her cheek, her respiration was short and difficult, and her pulse beat with feverish excitement. She was thinking of the despair of Maximilian, when informed that Madame de Saint-Méran, instead of being an ally, was unconsciously acting as his enemy.

More than once she thought of revealing all to her grandmother, and she would not have hesitated a single moment, if Maximilian Morrel had been named Albert de Morcerf or Raoul de Château-Renaud; but Morrel was of plebeian extraction, and Valentine knew how the haughty Marquise de Saint-Méran despised all who were not noble. Her secret had each time been repressed when she was about to reveal it, by the sad conviction that it would be useless to do so; for, were it once discovered by her father and mother, all would be lost.

Two hours passed thus; Madame de Saint-Méran was in a feverish sleep, and the notary had arrived. Though announced in a very low tone, Madame de Saint-Méran arose from her pillow.

"The notary!" she exclaimed, "let him come in."

The notary, who was at the door, immediately entered. "Go, Valentine," said Madame de Saint-Méran, "and leave me with this gentleman."

"But, mother ——"

"Leave me! — go!"

The young girl kissed her grandmother, and left with her handkerchief to her eyes; at the door she found the valet-de-chambre, who told her the doctor was waiting in the dining-room. Valentine instantly ran down. The doctor was a friend of the family, and at the same time one of the cleverest men of the day, and very fond of Valentine, whose birth he had witnessed. He had himself a daughter about her age, but whose life was one continued source of anxiety and fear to him, from her mother having been consumptive.

"Oh," said Valentine, "we have been waiting for you with such impatience, dear M. d'Avrigny. But, first of all, how are Madeleine and Antoinette?"

Madeleine was the daughter of M. d'Avrigny, and Antoinette his niece. M. d'Avrigny smiled sadly.

"Antoinette is very well," he said, "and Madeleine tolerably so. But you sent for me, my dear child. It is not your father or Madame de Villefort who is ill? As for you, although we doctors cannot divest our patients of nerves, I fancy you have no further need of me than to recommend you not to allow your imagination to take too wide a field."

Valentine colored. M. d'Avrigny carried the science of divination almost to a miracle, for he was one of those doctors who always work upon the body through the mind.

"No," she replied, "it is for my poor grandmother: you know the calamity that has happened to us, do you not?"

"I know nothing," said M. d'Avrigny.

"Alas!" said Valentine, restraining her tears, "my grandfather is dead."

"M. de Saint-Méran?"

"Yes."

"Suddenly?"

"From an apoplectic stroke."

"An apoplectic stroke?" repeated the doctor.

"Yes! and my poor grandmother fancies that her husband, whom she never left, has called her, and that she must go and join him. Oh, M. d'Avrigny, I beseech you, do something for her!"

"Where is she?"

"In her room with the notary."

"And M. Noirtier?"

"Just as he was, his mind perfectly clear, but the same incapability of moving or speaking."

"And the same love for you — eh, my dear child?"

"Yes," said Valentine; "he was very fond of me."

"Who does not love you?" Valentine smiled sadly. "What are your grandmother's symptoms?"

"An extreme nervous excitement, and a strangely agitated sleep; she fancied this morning in her sleep, that her soul was hovering above her body, which she at the same time watched. It must have been delirium; she fancies, too, that she saw a phantom enter her chamber, and even heard the noise it made on touching her glass."

"It is singular," said the doctor; "I was not aware that Madame de Saint-Méran was subject to such hallucinations."

"It is the first time I ever saw her thus," said Valentine, "and this morning she frightened me so, that I thought her mad; and my father, who, you know, is a strong-minded man, himself appeared deeply impressed."

"We will go and see," said the doctor; "what you tell me seems very strange." The notary here descended, and Valentine was informed her grandmother was alone.

"Go upstairs," she said to the doctor.

"And you?"

"Oh, I dare not — she forbade my sending for you; and, as you say, I am myself agitated, feverish, and unwell. I will go and take a turn in the garden to recover myself."

The doctor pressed Valentine's hand, and while he visited her grandmother, she descended the steps. We need not say which portion of the garden was her favorite walk. After remaining for a short time in the parterre surrounding the house, and gathering a rose to place in her waist or hair, she turned into the dark avenue which led to the garden-seat; then from the seat she went to the gate. As usual, Valentine strolled for a short time among her flowers, but without gathering them. The mourning in her heart forbade her assuming this simple ornament, though she had not yet had time to put on the outward semblance of woe.

Doctor d'Avrigny.

She then turned toward the avenue. As she advanced she fancied she heard a voice pronounce her name. She stopped astonished, then the voice reached her ears more distinctly, and she recognized it to be that of Maximilian.

CHAPTER LXXIII

THE PROMISE

IT was indeed Maximilian Morrel, who had passed a wretched existence since the previous day. With that instinct peculiar to lovers, he had anticipated, after the return of Madame de Saint-Méran and the death of the marquis, that something would occur at Villefort's in connection with his love for Valentine. His presentiments were realized, as we shall see, and it was more than simple disquiet which led him, pale and trembling, to the gate under the chestnut-trees.

Valentine was ignorant of his presence, and as it was not his accustomed hour for visiting her, pure chance, or rather a happy sympathy, led her at the moment to that spot. Morrel called her, and she ran to the gate.

"You here at this hour?" said she.

"Yes, my poor girl," replied Morrel; "I come to bring and to hear bad tidings."

"This is indeed a house of mourning!" said Valentine; "speak, Maximilian, although the cup of sorrow seems already full."

"Dear Valentine," said Morrel, endeavoring to conceal his own emotion, "listen, I entreat you; what I am about to say is serious. When are you to be married?"

"I will tell you all," said Valentine; "from you I have nothing to conceal. This morning the subject was introduced, and my grandmother, on whom I depended as my only support, not only declared herself favorable to it, but is so anxious for it that they only await the arrival of M. d'Epinay, and the following day the contract will be signed."

A deep sigh escaped the young man, who gazed long and mournfully at her he loved.

"Alas!" replied he, "it is terrible to listen tranquilly when the woman one loves says, 'The time of your punishment is fixed; in a few hours it will be executed; it must be so, and I will not endeavor to prevent it.' Well, since you say nothing remains but for M. d'Epinay to arrive that the contract may be signed, and the following day you will be his, *to-morrow* you will be engaged to M. d'Epinay, for he came this morning to Paris." Valentine uttered a cry.

"I was at the house of Monte-Cristo an hour since," said Morrel; "we were speaking, he of the sorrow of your family, and I of your grief, when a carriage rolled into the court-yard. Never, till then, had I placed any confidence in presentiments, but now I cannot help believing them, Valentine. At the sound of that carriage I shuddered; soon I heard steps on the staircase, which terrified me as much as the footsteps of the commendatore did Don Juan. The door at last opened; Albert de Morcerf entered first, and I began to hope my fears were vain, when, after him, another young man advanced, and the count exclaimed: 'Ah! M. le Baron Franz d'Epinay!' I summoned all my strength and courage to my support. Perhaps I turned pale and trembled, but certainly I smiled; and, five minutes after, I left, without having heard one word that had been spoken during the time; I felt annihilated."

"Poor Maximilian!" murmured Valentine.

"Valentine, the time has arrived when you must answer me, for my life depends on your answer. What do you intend doing?" Valentine held down her head; she was overwhelmed.

"Listen!" said Morrel; "it is not the first time you have contemplated our present position, which is a serious and urgent one; I do not think it is a moment to give way to useless sorrow; leave that for those who like to suffer at their leisure and indulge their grief in secret. There are such in the world, and God will, doubtless, reward them in heaven for their resignation on earth; but those who mean to contend must not lose one precious moment, but must return, immediately, the blow which fortune strikes. Do you intend to struggle against our ill-fortune? Tell me, Valentine, for it is this which I came to learn."

Valentine trembled, and looked at him with amazement. The idea of resisting her father, her grandmother, and all the family had never occurred to her.

"What do you say, Maximilian?" asked Valentine. "What do you term a struggle? Oh! it would be a sacrilege. What! I resist my father's order, and my dying grandmother's wish? Impossible!"

Morrel started.

"You are too noble not to understand me, and you understand me so well that you already yield, dear Maximilian. No, no! I shall need all my strength to struggle with myself and support my grief in secret, as you say. But to grieve my father — to disturb my grandmother's last moments — never!"

"You are right," said Morrel, calmly.

"In what a tone you speak!" cried Valentine.

"I speak as one who admires you, mademoiselle."

"Mademoiselle!" cried Valentine; "mademoiselle! Oh, selfish man! he sees me in despair, and pretends he cannot understand me!"

"You mistake — I understand you perfectly. You will not oppose M. Villefort; you will not displease the marchioness; and to-morrow you will sign the contract which will bind you to your husband."

"But, tell me, how can I do otherwise?"

"Do not appeal to me, mademoiselle; I shall be a bad judge in such a case; my selfishness will blind me," replied Morrel, whose low voice and clenched hands announced his growing desperation.

"What would you have proposed, Morrel, had you found me willing to accede to your proposition? It is not enough to say, 'You are wrong'; you must advise me what to do."

"Do you seriously ask my advice, Valentine?"

"Certainly, dear Maximilian, for if it is good, I will follow it; you know my devotion to you."

"Valentine," said Morrel, pushing aside a plank that was split, "give me your hand in token of forgiveness of my anger; my senses are confused, and during the last hour the most extravagant thoughts have passed through my brain. Oh, if you refuse my advice ——"

"What do you advise?" said Valentine, raising her eyes to heaven, and sighing.

"I advise this; I am free," replied Maximilian, "and rich enough for two. I swear to make you my wife before my lips even shall have touched your forehead."

"You make me tremble!" said the young girl.

"Follow me," said Morrel; "I will take you to my sister, who is worthy also to be yours. We will embark for Algiers, for England, for America, or, if you prefer it, retire to the country, and only return to Paris when our friends have reconciled your family."

Valentine shook her head.

"I feared it, Maximilian," said she; "it is the counsel of a madman, and I should be more mad than you, did I not stop you at once with the word 'Impossible, Morrel, impossible!'"

"You will then submit to what fate decrees for you without even attempting to contend with it?" said Morrel, sorrowfully.

"Yes,—if I die!"

"Well, Valentine," resumed Maximilian, "I again repeat, you are right. Truly, it is I who am mad, and you prove to me that passion blinds the most correct minds. I appreciate your passionless reasoning. It is, then, understood, to-morrow you will be irrevocably promised to M. Franz d'Epinay, not by that theatrical formality invented to heighten the effect of a comedy called the signature of the contract, but your own will?"

"Again you drive me to despair, Maximilian," said Valentine; "again you turn the dagger in the wound! What would you do,—tell me if your sister listened to such a proposition?"

"Mademoiselle," replied Morrel, with a bitter smile, "I am selfish,—you have already said so,—and, as a selfish man, I think not of what others would do in my situation, but of what I intend doing myself. I think only that I have known you now a whole year. From the day I first saw you, all my hopes of happiness have been in securing your affection. One day you acknowledged that you loved me; and since that day my hope of future happiness has rested on obtaining you; it has been life to me. Now, I think no more; I say only that fortune has turned—I had thought to gain heaven, and now I have lost it. It is an every-day occurrence for a gambler to lose not only what he possesses, but also what he has not."

Morrel pronounced these words with perfect calmness; Valentine looked at him a moment with her large, scrutinizing eyes, endeavoring not to let Morrel discover the grief which struggled in her heart.

"But, in a word, what are you going to do?" asked she.

"I am going to have the honor of taking my leave of you, mademoiselle, solemnly assuring you that I wish your life may be so calm, so happy, and so fully occupied, that there may be no place for me even in your memory."

"Oh!" murmured Valentine.

"Adieu, Valentine, adieu!" said Morrel, bowing.

"Where are you going?" cried the young girl, extending her hand through the opening, and seizing Maximilian by his coat, for she understood from her own agitated feelings that her lover's calmness could not be real; "where are you going?"

"I am going, that I might not bring fresh trouble into your family; and to set an example which every honest and devoted man, situated as I am, may follow."

"Before you leave me, tell me what you are going to do, Maximilian?"

The young man smiled sorrowfully.

"Speak! speak!" said Valentine; "I entreat you."

"Has your resolution changed, Valentine?"

"It cannot change, unhappy man! you know it must not!" cried the young girl.

"Then adieu, Valentine!"

Valentine shook the gate with a strength of which she could not have been supposed to be possessed, as Morrel was going away, and passing both her hands through the opening, she clasped and wrung them. "I must know what you mean to do!" said she. "Where are you going?"

"Oh! fear not," said Maximilian, stopping at a short distance, "I do not intend to render another man responsible for the rigorous fate reserved for me. Another might threaten to seek M. Franz, to provoke him, and to fight with him; all that would be folly. What has M. Franz to do with it? He saw me this morning for the first time, and has already forgotten he has seen me. He did not even know I existed when it was arranged by your two families that you should be united. I have nothing against M. Franz, and promise you I shall not blame him."

"Whom, then? Me?"

"You, Valentine! Oh, Heaven forbid! Woman is sacred, the woman one loves is holy."

"On yourself, then, unhappy man; on yourself?"

"I am the only guilty person, am I not?" said Maximilian.

"Maximilian!" said Valentine, "Maximilian, return, I entreat you!" He drew near, with his sweet smile, and, but for his paleness, one might have thought him in his usual happy frame.

"Listen, my dear, my adored Valentine," said he in his melodious and grave tone; "those who, like us, have never had a thought for which we need blush before the world or before God, such may read each other's heart like open books. I never was romantic, and am no melancholy hero. I imitate neither Manfred nor Anthony; but without words, without protestations and without vows, I have staked my life on you; you leave me, and you are right in doing so,—I repeat it, you are right; but in losing you, I lose my life. The moment you leave me, Valentine, I am alone in the world. My sister is happily married; her husband is only my brother-in-law, that is, a man whom the ties of social life alone attach to me; no one on earth, then, longer needs my useless life. This is what I shall do; I will wait until the very moment you are married, for I will not lose the shadow of one of those unexpected chances which are sometimes reserved for us, for, after all, M. Franz may die before that time; a thunderbolt may fall even on the altar as you approach it; nothing appears impossible to one condemned to die, and miracles appear quite reasonable when his escape from death is concerned. I will, then, wait until the last moment, and when my misery is certain, irremediable, hopeless, I will write a confidential letter to my brother-in-law, another to the prefect of police, to acquaint them with my intention, and at the corner of some wood, on the brink of some abyss, on

the bank of some river, I will put an end to my existence, as certainly as I am the son of the most honest man who ever lived in France."

Valentine trembled convulsively; she loosed her hold of the gate, her arms fell by her side, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. The young man stood before her, sorrowful and resolute.

"Oh! for pity's sake," said she, "you will live, will you not?"

"No! on my honor," said Maximilian; "but that will not affect you. You have done your duty, and your conscience will be at rest."

Valentine fell on her knees, and pressed her almost bursting heart. "Maximilian!" said she, "Maximilian, my friend, my brother on earth, my true husband in heaven, I entreat you, do as I do, live in suffering; perhaps we may one day be united."

"Adieu, Valentine," repeated Morrel.

"My God," said Valentine, raising both her hands to heaven with a sublime expression, "I have done my utmost to remain a submissive daughter; I have begged, entreated, implored; he has regarded neither my prayers, my entreaties, nor my tears. It is done," cried she, wiping away her tears, and resuming her firmness, "I am resolved not to die of remorse, but rather of shame. Live, Maximilian, and I will be yours. Say, when shall it be? Speak, command, I will obey."

Morrel, who had already gone some few steps away, again returned, and, pale with joy, extended both hands toward Valentine, through the opening.

"Valentine," said he, "dear Valentine, you must not speak thus — rather let me die. Why should I obtain you by violence, if our love is mutual? Is it from mere humanity you bid me live? I would then rather die."

"Truly," murmured Valentine, "who on this earth cares for me? He. Who has consoled me in my sorrow? He. On whom do my hopes rest? On whom does my bleeding heart repose? On him, on him, always on him! Yes, you are right; Maximilian, I will follow you. I will leave the paternal home, I will give up all. Oh! ungrateful girl that I am," cried Valentine, sobbing, "I will give up all, even my dear old grandfather, whom I had nearly forgotten."

"No," said Maximilian, "you shall not leave him. M. Noirtier has evinced, you say, a kind feeling toward you. Well! before you leave, tell him all; his consent would be your justification in God's sight. As soon as we are married, he shall come and live with us; instead of one child, he shall have two. You have told me how you talk to him, and how he answers you; I shall very soon learn that language by signs, Valentine; and I promise you solemnly, that instead of despair, it is happiness that awaits us."

"Oh! see, Maximilian, see the power you have over me, you almost make me believe you; and yet, what you tell me is madness, for my father will curse me — he is inflexible — he will never pardon me. Now, listen to me, Maximilian; if by artifice, by entreaty, by accident — in short, if by any means I can delay this marriage, will you wait?"

"Yes, I promise you, as faithfully as you have promised me, that this horrible marriage shall not take place, and that if you are dragged before a magistrate or a priest, you will say 'No.'"

"I promise you by all that is most sacred to me in the world; namely, by my mother."

"We will wait then," said Morrel.

"Yes, we will wait," said Valentine, who revived at these words; "there are so many things which may save unhappy beings such as we are."

"I rely on you, Valentine," said Morrel; "all you do will be well done; only if they disregard your prayers, if your father and Madame de Saint-Méran insist that M. d'Epinay should be called to-morrow, to sign the contract —— "

"Then you have my promise, Morrel."

"Instead of signing —— "

"I will rejoin you, and we will fly; but from this moment until then, let us not tempt Providence, Morrel; let us not see each other; it is a miracle, it is a providence that we have not been discovered; if we were surprised, if it were known that we met thus, we should have no further resource."

"You are right, Valentine; but how shall I ascertain?"

"From the notary, M. Deschamps."

"I know him."

"And for myself — I will write to you, depend on me. I dread this marriage, Maximilian, as much as you."

"Thank you, my adored Valentine, thank you; that is enough. When once I know the hour, I will hasten to this spot, you can easily get over this fence in my arms, a carriage will await us at the gate, in which you will accompany me to my sister's; there living, retired or mingling in society, as you wish, we shall be conscious of our power and our will; and not suffer ourselves to be put to death like sheep, which only defend themselves by sighs."

"Yes," said Valentine, "I will now acknowledge you are right, Maximilian; and now are you satisfied with your betrothal?" said the young girl sorrowfully.

"My adored Valentine, words cannot express one-half of my satisfaction."

Valentine had approached, or rather, had placed her lips so near the fence, that they nearly touched those of Morrel, which were placed against the other side of the cold and inexorable barrier.

"Adieu, then, till we meet again," said Valentine, tearing herself away. "I shall hear from you?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, thanks, dear love, adieu!"

The sound of a kiss was heard, and Valentine fled through the avenue. Morrel listened to catch the last sound of her dress brushing the branches, and of her footstep on the path, then raised his eyes with an ineffable smile of thankfulness to heaven for being permitted to be thus loved, and then also disappeared.

The young man returned home and waited all the evening and all the next day without hearing anything. It was only on the following day, at about ten o'clock in the morning, as he was starting to call on M. Deschamps, the notary, that he received from the postman a small billet, which he knew to be from Valentine, although he had not before seen her writing.

It was to this effect:

"Tears, entreaties, prayers have availed me nothing. Yesterday, for two hours, I was at the church of Saint-Philippe du Roule, and for two hours I prayed most fervently. Heaven is as inflexible as man, and the signature of the contract is fixed for this evening at nine o'clock. I have but one promise and but one heart to give; that promise is pledged to you, that heart is also yours. This evening, then, at a quarter before nine, at the gate.

"Your betrothed,

"VALENTINE DE VILLEFORT."

"P.S.—My poor grandmother gets worse and worse; yesterday her fever amounted to delirium; to-day her delirium is almost madness. You will be very kind to me, will you not, Morrel, to make me forget my sorrow in leaving her thus? I think it is kept a secret from Grandpapa Noirtier that the contract is to be signed this evening."

Morrel went also to the notary, who confirmed his account of the proposed signature. Then he went to call on Monte-Cristo, and heard still more. Franz had been to announce the solemnity, and Madame de Villefort had also written to beg the count to excuse her not inviting him; the death of M. de Saint-Méran, and the dangerous illness of his widow, would cast a gloom over the meeting which she would regret the count should share, whom she wished might enjoy every happiness.

The day before, Franz had been presented to Madame de Saint-Méran, who had left her bed to receive him, but had been obliged to return to it immediately after.

It is easy to suppose that Morrel's agitation would not escape the count's penetrating eye. Monte-Cristo was more affectionate than ever,—indeed his manner was so kind, that several times Morrel was on the point of telling him all. But he recalled the promise he had made to Valentine, and kept his secret. The young man read Valentine's letter twenty times in the course of the day. It was her first, and on what an occasion! Each time he read it he renewed his vow to make her happy. How great is the authority of one who has made so courageous a resolution! What devotion does she not deserve from him for whom she has sacrificed everything! How she ought really to be supremely loved! She becomes at once a queen and a wife, and it is impossible to thank and love her sufficiently.

Morrel longed intensely for the moment when he should hear Valentine say, "Here I am, Maximilian; come and help me." He had arranged everything for her escape; two ladders were hidden in the clover-field; a cab was ordered for Maximilian alone, without a servant, without lights; at the turning of the first street they would light the lamps, as it would be foolish to attract the notice of the police by too many precautions. Occasionally he shuddered; he thought of the moment when, from the top of that wall, he should protect the descent of his dear Valentine, and feel, trembling and abandoned in his arms, her whose hand he had only pressed, and kissed only on the finger-tips.

When the afternoon arrived, and he felt the hour was drawing near, he wished for solitude, his agitation was extreme; a simple question from a friend would have irritated him. He shut himself in his room, and tried to read; but his eye glanced over the page without understanding a word, and he threw away the book, and for the second time sat down to sketch his plan, the ladders, and the fence.

At length the hour drew near. Never did a man deeply in love allow the clocks to go on peacefully. Morrel tormented his so effectually that they struck eight at half-past six. He then said, "It is time to start: the signature was indeed fixed to take place at nine o'clock, but perhaps Valentine will not wait for that." Consequently, Morrel, having left the Rue Meslay at half-past eight by his time-piece, entered the clover-field while the clock of Saint-Philippe du Roule was striking eight. The horse and cab were concealed behind a small ruin, where Morrel had often waited.

The night gradually drew on, and the foliage in the garden assumed a deeper hue. Then Morrel came out from his hiding-place with a beating heart, and looked through the small opening in the paling; there was yet no one to be seen.

The clock struck half-past eight, and still another half-hour was passed in waiting, while Morrel looked to and fro, and gazed more and more frequently through the opening. The garden became darker still, but in the darkness he looked in vain for the white dress; and in the silence he vainly listened for the sound of footsteps. The house, which was discernible through the trees, remained in darkness, and gave no indication that so important an event as the signature of a marriage-contract was going on. Morrel looked at his watch, which wanted a quarter to ten; but soon the same clock he had already heard strike two or three times rectified the error by striking half-past nine.

This was already half an hour past the time Valentine had fixed. She had fixed nine o'clock, earlier rather than later. It was a terrible moment for the young man, on whose heart every second smote like the stroke of a hammer. The slightest rustling of the foliage, the least whistling of the wind, attracted his attention and drew the perspiration on his brow; then he tremblingly fixed his ladder, and, not to lose a moment, placed his foot on the first step. Amidst all these alternations of hope and fear, the clock in the church struck ten. "It is impossible," said Maximilian, "that the signing of a contract should occupy so long a time without unexpected interruptions. I have weighed all the chances, calculated the time required for all the forms; something must have happened."

And then he walked rapidly to and fro, and pressed his burning forehead against the fence. Had Valentine fainted? or had she been discovered and stopped in her flight? These were the only preventives which appeared possible to the young man.

The idea that her strength had failed her in attempting to escape, and that she had fainted in one of the paths, was the obstacle most impressed upon his mind. "In that case," said he, "I should lose her, and by my own fault." He dwelt on this thought one moment, then it appeared reality. He even thought he could perceive something on the ground at a distance; he ventured to call, and it seemed to him that the wind wafted back an almost inarticulate sigh.

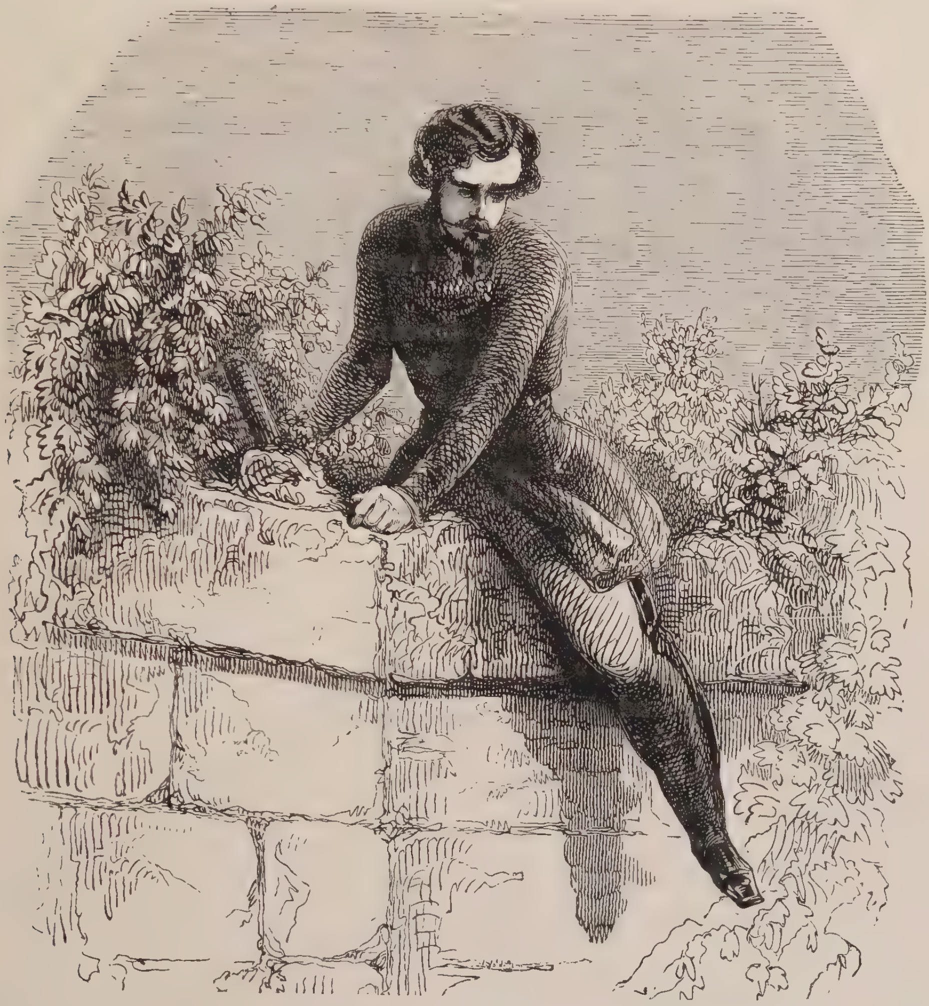
At last the half-hour struck. It was impossible to wait longer; his temples throbbed, his eyes were growing dim; he passed one leg over the wall, and leaped down on the other side. He was on Villefort's premises—had arrived there by scaling the wall. What might be the consequences? However, he had not ventured thus far to draw back. He followed a short distance close under the wall, then crossed a path, and entered a clump of trees. In a moment he had passed through them, and could see the house distinctly.

Then Morrel was convinced of one thing, which he had already inferred from glimpses between the trees; instead of lights at every window, as is customary on days of ceremony, he saw only a gray mass, which was veiled also by a cloud, which at that moment obscured the moon's feeble light. A light moved rapidly from time to time past three windows of the first floor. These three windows were in Madame de Saint-Méran's room. Another remained motionless behind some red curtains which were in Madame de Villefort's bedroom. Morrel guessed all this. So many times, in order to follow Valentine in thought at

VILLEFORT AND THE DOCTOR.

every hour in the day, had he made her describe all the house, that, without having seen it, he knew it all.

This darkness and silence alarmed Morrel still more than Valentine's absence had done. Almost mad with grief, and determined to venture everything in order to see Valentine once more, and be certain of the misfortune he feared, Morrel gained the edge of the clump of trees, and was going to pass as quickly as possible through the open flower-garden, when the sound of a voice, still at some distance, but which was borne upon the wind, reached him. At this sound, as he was already partially exposed to view, he stepped back and concealed himself completely, remaining perfectly motionless.



He had formed his resolution; if it was Valentine alone, he would speak as she passed; if she was accompanied, and he could not speak, still he should see her, and know that she was safe; if they were strangers, he would listen to their conversation, and might understand something of this hitherto incomprehensible mystery.

The moon had just then escaped from behind the cloud which had concealed it, and Morrel saw Villefort come out upon the steps, followed by a gentleman in black. They descended and advanced toward the clump of trees, and Morrel soon recognized the other gentleman as Doctor d'Avrigny.

The young man, seeing them approach, drew back mechanically until he found himself stopped by a sycamore-tree in the center of the clump; there he was compelled to remain. Soon the two gentlemen stopped also.

"Ah, my dear doctor," said the *procureur*, "Heaven declares itself against my house! What a dreadful death—what a blow! Seek not to console me; alas! nothing can alleviate so great a sorrow—the wound is too deep and too fresh! She is dead! she is dead!"

A cold dampness covered the young man's brow, and his teeth chattered. Who could be dead in that house, which Villefort himself had called accursed?

"My dear M. de Villefort," replied the doctor, with a tone which redoubled the terror of the young man, "I have not led you here to console you; on the contrary ——"

"What can you mean?" asked the *procureur*, alarmed.

"I mean that, behind the misfortune which has just happened to you, there is another, perhaps, still greater."

"Can it be possible?" murmured Villefort, clasping his hands. "What are you going to tell me?"

"Are we quite alone, my friend?"

"Yes, quite; but why all these precautions?"

"Because I have a terrible secret to communicate to you," said the doctor. "Let us sit down."

Villefort fell, rather than seated himself. The doctor stood before him, with one hand placed on his shoulder. Morrel, horrified, supported his head with one hand, and with the other pressed his heart, lest its beatings should be heard. "Dead! dead!" repeated he within himself; and he felt as if he were also dying.

"Speak, doctor—I am listening," said Villefort; "strike—I am prepared for everything!"

"Madame de Saint-Méran was, doubtless, advancing in years, but she enjoyed excellent health." Morrel began again to breathe freely, which he had not done the last ten minutes.

"Grief has consumed her," said Villefort—"yes, grief, doctor! After living forty years with the marquis——"

"It is not grief, my dear Villefort," said the doctor; "grief may kill, although it rarely does, and never in a day, never in an hour, never in ten minutes." Villefort answered nothing; he simply raised his head, which had been cast down before, and looked at the doctor with amazement.

"Were you present during the last struggle?" asked M. d'Avrigny.

"I was," replied the *procureur*; "you begged me not to leave."

"Did you notice the symptoms of the disease to which Madame de Saint-Méran has fallen a victim?"

"I did. Madame de Saint-Méran had three successive attacks, at intervals of some minutes, each one more serious than the former. When you arrived, Madame de Saint-Méran had already been panting for breath some minutes; she then had an attack, which I took to be simply nervous, and it was only when I saw her raise herself in the bed, and her limbs and neck appear stiffened, that I became really alarmed. Then I understood from your countenance there was more to fear than I had thought. This crisis past, I endeavored to catch your eye, but could not. You held her hand—you were feeling her pulse—and the second fit came on before you had turned toward me. This was more terrible than the first; the same nervous movements were repeated, and the mouth contracted and turned purple. At the third she expired. At the end of the first attack I discovered symptoms of tetanus; you confirmed my opinion."

"Yes, before others," replied the doctor; "but now we are alone——"

"What are you going to say?"

"That the symptoms of tetanus and poisoning by vegetable substances are the same."

M. de Villefort started from his seat, then in a moment fell down again, silent and motionless. Morrel knew not if he were dreaming or awake.

"Listen," said the doctor; "I know the full importance of the statement I have just made, and the disposition of the man to whom I have made it."

"Do you speak to me as a magistrate or as a friend?" asked Villefort.

"As a friend, and only as a friend, at this moment. The similarity in the symptoms of tetanus and poisoning by vegetable substances is so great, that were I obliged to affirm by oath what I have now stated, I should hesitate; I therefore repeat to you, I speak not to a magistrate, but to a friend. And to that friend I say, 'During the three-quarters of an hour that the struggle continued, I watched the convulsions and the death of Madame de Saint-Méran, and am thoroughly convinced that not only did her death proceed from poison, but I could also specify the poison.'"

"Indeed, sir! — indeed!"

"The symptoms are marked, do you see? — sleep disturbed by nervous fits, excitement of the brain, torpor of the nervous centers. Madame de Saint-Méran has sunk under a violent dose of *brucine* or of *strychnine*, which by some mistake, perhaps, has been given to her."

Villefort seized the doctor's hand.

"Oh, it is impossible!" said he; "I must be dreaming! It is frightful to hear such things from such a man as you! Tell me, I entreat you, my dear doctor, that you may be deceived."

"Doubtless I may, but ——"

"But?"

"But I do not think so."

"Have pity on me, doctor! So many dreadful things have happened to me lately that I am on the verge of madness."

"Has any one besides me seen Madame de Saint-Méran?"

"No."

"Has anything been sent for from a chemist's that I have not examined?"

"Nothing."

"Had Madame de Saint-Méran any enemies?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Would her death affect any one's interest?"

"It could not indeed; my daughter is her only heiress — Valentine, alone. Oh, if such a thought could present itself, I would stab myself to punish my heart for having for one instant harbored it."

"Indeed, my dear friend," said M. d'Avrigny, "I would not accuse any one; I speak only of an accident, you understand; of a mistake: but whether accident or mistake, the fact is there; it speaks to my conscience, and compels me to speak aloud to you. Make inquiry."

"Of whom? — how? — of what?"

"May not Barrois, the old servant, have made a mistake, and have given Madame de Saint-Méran a dose prepared for his master?"

"For my father?"

"Yes."

"But how could a dose prepared for M. Noirtier poison Madame de Saint-Méran?"

"Nothing is more simple. You know poisons become remedies in certain diseases, of which paralysis is one. For instance, having tried every other remedy to restore movement and speech to M. Noirtier, I resolved to try one last means, and for three months I have been giving him brucine; so that in the last dose I ordered for him there was one grain. This quantity, which it is perfectly safe to administer to the paralyzed frame of M. Noirtier, which has become gradually accustomed to it, would be sufficient to kill another person."

"My dear doctor, there is no communication between M. Noirtier's apartment and that of Madame de Saint-Méran, and Barrois never entered my mother-in-law's room. In short, doctor, although I know you to be the most skillful and the most conscientious man in the world, and although, under all circumstances, your word will be a lamp to guide me, like the light of the sun, still, doctor, I want, notwithstanding my conviction, to believe this axiom *errare humanum est.*"

"Listen, Villefort," said the doctor, "is there one of my brethren in whom you have equal confidence with myself."

"Why do you ask me that? — what do you wish?"

"Send for him; I will tell him what I have seen, and we will consult together, and hold an autopsy."

"And you will find traces of poison?"

"No, I did not say of poison, but we can prove what was the state of the body: we shall discover the cause of her sudden death, and we shall say, 'Dear Villefort, if this thing has been caused by negligence, watch over your servants; if from hatred, watch your enemies.'"

"What do you propose to me, d'Avrigny?" said Villefort in despair, "so soon as another is admitted into our secret, an inquest will become necessary; and an inquest in my house — impossible! Still," continued the *procureur*, looking at the doctor with uneasiness, "if you wish it — if you demand it, it shall be done. But, doctor, you see me already so grieved — how can I introduce into my house so much scandal, after so much sorrow? My wife and my daughter would die of it! And I, doctor — you know a man does not arrive at the post I occupy — one has not been *procureur du roi* twenty-five years without having amassed a tolerable number of enemies: mine are numerous. Let this affair be talked of; it will be a triumph for them, which will make them rejoice, and cover me with shame. Pardon me, doctor, these worldly ideas; were you a priest I should not dare tell you that; but you are a man, and you know mankind. Doctor, pray recall your words; you have said nothing, have you?"

"My dear M. de Villefort," replied the doctor, "my first duty is humanity. I would have saved Madame de Saint-Méran, if science could have done it; but she is dead, my duty regards the living. Let us bury this terrible secret in the deepest recesses of our hearts; I am willing, if any one should suspect this, that my silence on this subject should be imputed to my ignorance. Meanwhile, sir, watch always — watch carefully, for, perhaps, the evil may not stop here. And when you have found the culprit, if you find him, I will say to you, 'You are a magistrate; do as you will!'"

"I thank you, doctor," said Villefort, with indescribable joy; "I never had a better friend than you." And, as if he feared Doctor d'Avrigny would recall his promise, he hurried him toward the house.

When they were gone, Morrel ventured out from under the trees and the moon shone upon his face, which was so pale it might have been taken for a phantom.

"I am manifestly protected in a most wonderful but most terrible manner," said he; "but Valentine, poor girl! how will she bear so much sorrow?"

As he thought thus, he looked alternately at the window with red curtains and the three windows with white curtains. The light had almost disappeared from the former; doubtless Madame de Villefort had just put out her lamp, and the night-lamp alone reflected its dull light on the window. At the extremity of the building, on the contrary, he saw one of the three windows open. A wax-light placed on the mantel-piece threw some of its pale rays without, and a shadow was seen for one moment on the balcony. Morrel shuddered; he thought he heard a sob.

It cannot be wondered at that his mind, generally so courageous, but now disturbed by the two strongest human passions, love and fear, was weakened even to the indulgence of superstitious thoughts. Although it was impossible Valentine could see him, hidden as he was, he thought he heard the shadow at the window call him; his disturbed mind told him so, his burning heart repeated it. This double error became an irresistible reality, and by one of those incomprehensible transports of youth, he bounded from his hiding-place, and with two strides, at the risk of being seen, at the risk of alarming Valentine, at the risk of being discovered by some exclamation which might escape the young girl, he crossed the flower-garden, which, by the light of the moon, resembled a large white lake, and, having passed the rows of orange-trees which extended in front of the house, he reached the step, ran quickly up, and pushed the door, which opened without offering any resistance.

Valentine had not seen him; her eyes, raised toward heaven, were watching a silvery cloud gliding over the azure; its form was that of a shadow mounting toward heaven; her poetic and excited mind pictured it as the soul of her grandmother.

Meanwhile, Morrel had traversed the anteroom and found the staircase, which, being carpeted, prevented his approach being heard; and he had arrived at that degree of excitement that the presence of Villefort even would not have alarmed him. Had he encountered him, his resolution was formed; he would have approached him and acknowledged all, begging him to excuse and sanction the love which united him to his daughter, and his daughter to him. Morrel was mad.

Happily he did not meet any one. Now, especially, did he find the description Valentine had given of the interior of the house useful to him; he arrived safely at the top of the staircase, and while feeling his way, a sob indicated the direction he was to take; he turned back; a door partly open enabled him to see his road, and to hear the sorrowing voice. He pushed it open and entered. At the other end of the room, under a white sheet which covered the head and outlined the form, lay the corpse, still more alarming to Morrel since the account he had so unexpectedly overheard. By the side, on her knees, and her head buried in the cushion of an easy-chair, was Valentine, trembling and sobbing, her hands extended above her head, clasped and stiff. She had turned from the window, which remained open, and was praying in accents that would have affected the most unfeeling; her words were rapid, incoherent, unintelligible; for the burning weight of grief almost stopped her utterance.

The moon shining through the open blinds made the lamp appear to burn paler, and cast a sepulchral hue over the whole scene. Morrel could not resist this; he was not exemplary for piety, he was not easily impressed, but Valentine suffering, weeping, wringing her hands before him, was more than he could bear in silence. He sighed, and whispered a name, and the head bathed in tears and pressed on the velvet cushion of the chair — a head resembling a Magdalen by Correggio — was raised and turned toward him. Valentine perceived him without betraying the least surprise. A heart overwhelmed with one great grief is insensible to minor emotions. Morrel held out his hand to her. Valentine, as her only apology for not having met him, pointed to the corpse under the sheet, and began to sob again.

Neither dared for some time to speak in that room. They hesitated to break the silence which death, with finger on lip, seemed to impose; at length Valentine ventured:

"My friend," said she, "how came you here? Alas, I would say you are welcome, had not death opened the way for you into this house."

"Valentine," said Morrel, with a trembling voice, "I had waited since half-past eight, and did not see you come; I became uneasy, leaped the wall, found my way through the garden, when voices conversing about the fatal event ——"

"What voices?" asked Valentine. Morrel shuddered as he thought of the conversation of the doctor and Villefort, and he thought he could see through the sheet the extended hands, the stiff neck, and the purple lips.

"Your servants," said he, "who were repeating the whole of the sorrowful story; from them I learned it all."

"But it was risking the failure of our plan to come up here, love," said Valentine, without alarm or anger.

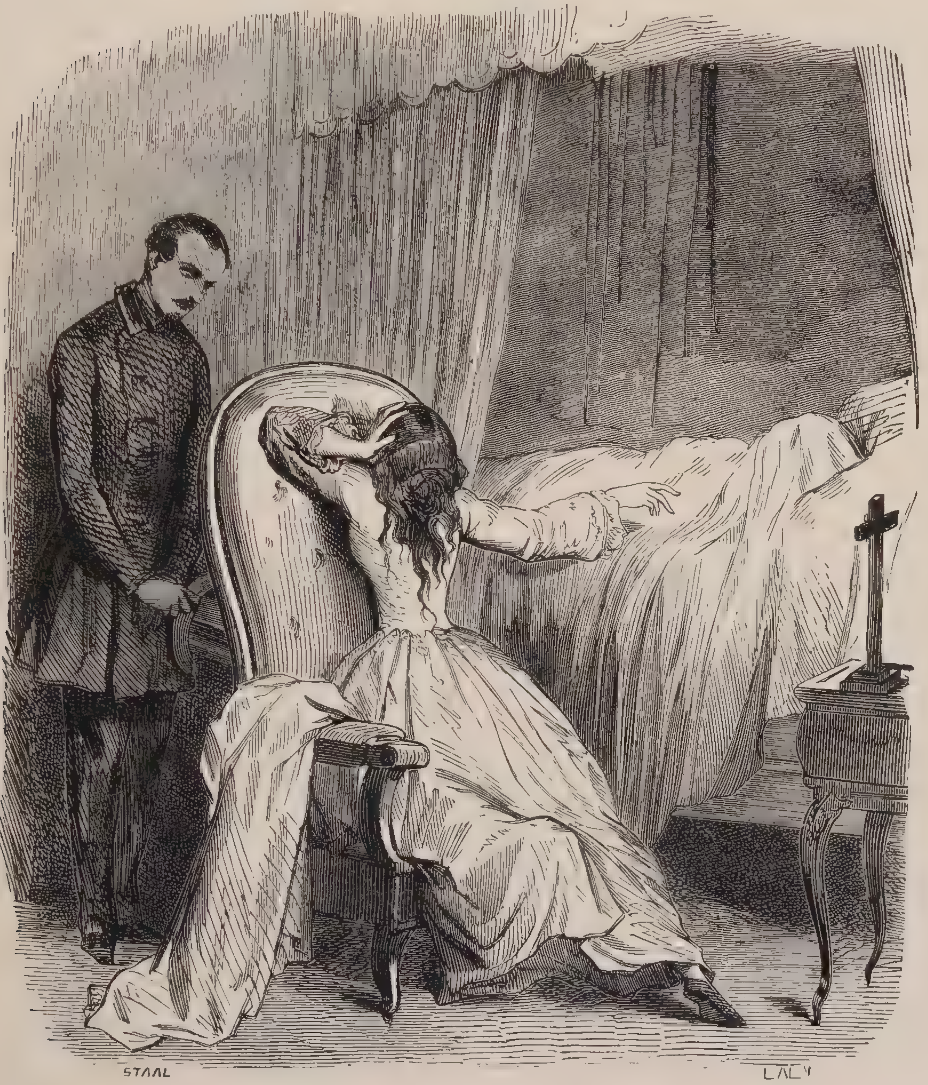
"Forgive me," replied Morrel; "I will go away."

"No," said Valentine, "you might meet some one; stay."

"But if any one should come here ——"

The young girl shook her head. "No one will come," said she; "do not fear, there is our safeguard," pointing to the bed.

"But what has become of M. d'Epinay?" replied Morrel.



"M. Franz arrived to sign the contract just as my dear grandmother was dying."

"Alas!" said Morrel, with a feeling of selfish joy; for he thought this death would cause the wedding to be postponed indefinitely.

"But what redoubles my sorrow," continued the young girl, as if this feeling was to receive its immediate punishment, "is that the poor old lady, on her death-bed, requested the marriage might take place as soon as possible; she also, thinking to protect me, was acting against me."

"Hark!" said Morrel. They both listened; steps were distinctly heard in the corridor and on the stairs.

"It is my father, who has just left his cabinet."

"To accompany the doctor to the door," added Morrel.

"How do you know it is the doctor?" asked Valentine, astonished.

"I imagine it must be," said Morrel.

Valentine looked at the young man; they heard the street-door close; then M. de Villefort locked the garden-door, and returned upstairs. He stopped a moment in the anteroom, as if hesitating whether to turn to his own apartment or into Madame de Saint-Méran's; Morrel concealed himself behind a door; Valentine remained motionless, grief seemed to deprive her of all fear. Villefort passed on to his own room.

"Now," said Valentine, "you can neither go out by the front-door nor by the garden."

Morrel looked at her with astonishment.

"There is but one way left you that is safe," said she; "it is through my grandfather's room."

She rose. "Come," she added.

"Where?" asked Maximilian.

"To my grandfather's room."

"I in M. Noirtier's apartment?"

"Yes."

"Can you mean it, Valentine?"

"I have long wished it; he is my only remaining friend, and we both need his help,—come."

"Be careful, Valentine," said Morrel, hesitating to comply with the young girl's wishes; "I now see my error—I acted as a madman in coming in here. Are you sure you are more reasonable?"

"Yes," said Valentine; "and I have but one scruple,—namely, that of leaving my dear grandmother's remains, which I have undertaken to watch."

"Valentine," said Morrel, "death is in itself sacred."

"Yes," said Valentine; "besides, it will not be for long."

She then crossed the corridor, and led the way down a narrow staircase to M. Noirtier's room; Morrel followed her on tiptoe; at the door they found the old servant.

"Barrois," said Valentine, "shut the door, and let no one come in."

She passed first.

Noirtier, seated in his chair, and listening to every sound, was watching the door; he saw Valentine, and his eye brightened. There was something grave and solemn in the bearing of the young girl which struck the old man, and immediately his bright eye began to interrogate.

"Dear grandfather," said she hurriedly, "you know poor grandmamma died an hour since, and now I have no friend in the world but you."

His expressive eyes evinced the greatest tenderness.

"To you alone, then, may I confide my sorrows and my hopes?"

The paralytic motioned, "Yes."

Valentine took Maximilian's hand.

"Look attentively, then, at this gentleman."

The old man fixed his scrutinizing gaze with slight astonishment on Morrel.

"It is M. Maximilian Morrel," said she; "the son of that good merchant of Marseilles, whom you doubtless recollect."

"Yes," said the old man.

"He brings an irreproachable name, which Maximilian is likely to render glorious, since at thirty years of age he is a captain, an officer of the Legion of Honor."

The old man signified that he recollected him.

"Well, grandpapa," said Valentine, kneeling before him, and pointing to Maximilian, "I love him, and will be only his; were I compelled to marry another, I would destroy myself." The eyes of the paralytic expressed a multitude of tumultuous thoughts.

"You like M. Maximilian Morrel; do you not, grandpapa?" asked Valentine.

"Yes,"

"And you will protect us, who are your children, against the will of my father?"

Noirtier cast an intelligent glance at Morrel, as if to say, "Perhaps I may."

Maximilian understood him.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "you have a sacred duty to fulfill in your deceased grandmother's room; will you allow me the honor of a few minutes' conversation with M. Noirtier?"

"That is it," said the old man's eye. Then he looked anxiously at Valentine.

"Do you fear he will not understand you?"

"Yes."

"Oh! we have so often spoken of you, that he knows exactly how I talk to you." Then turning to Maximilian with an adorable smile, although shaded by sorrow,—"He knows everything I know," said she.

Valentine rose, placed a chair for Morrel, requested Barrois not to admit any one, and having tenderly embraced her grandpapa, and sorrowfully taken leave of Morrel, she went away. To prove to Noirtier that he was in Valentine's confidence and knew all their secrets, Morrel took the dictionary, a pen, and some paper, and placed them all on a table where there was a light.

"But first," said Morrel, "allow me, sir, to tell you who I am, how much I love Mademoiselle Valentine, and what are my designs respecting her."

Nortier made a sign that he would listen.

It was an imposing sight to witness this old man, apparently a mere useless burden, becoming the sole protector, support, and adviser of the lovers, who were both young, beautiful, and strong. His remarkably noble and austere expression struck Morrel, who began his recital with trembling. He related the manner in which he had become acquainted with Valentine, and how he had loved her; and that Valentine, in her solitude and her misfortune, had accepted the offer of his devotion. He told him his birth, his position, his fortune; and more than once, when he consulted the look of the paralytic, that look answered, "That is good, proceed."

"And now," said Morrel, when he had finished the first part of his recital, "now I have told you of my love and my hopes, may I inform you of my intentions?"

"Yes," signified the old man.

"This was our resolution: a cab was in waiting at the gate, in which I intended to carry off Valentine to my sister's house, to marry her, and to wait respectfully M. de Villefort's pardon."

"No," said Noirtier.

"We must not do so?"

"No."

"You do not sanction our project?"

"No."

"There is another way," said Morrel. The old man's interrogative eye said, "Which?"

"I will go," continued Maximilian, "I will seek M. Franz d'Epinay — I am happy to be able to mention this in Mademoiselle de Villefort's absence — and will conduct myself toward him so as to compel him to challenge me." Noirtier's look continued to interrogate.

"You wish to know what I will do?"

"Yes."

"I will find him, as I told you; I will tell him the ties which bind me to Mademoiselle Valentine; if he be a sensible man, he will prove it by renouncing of his own accord the hand of his betrothed, and will secure my friendship and love until death; if he refuse, either through interest or ridiculous pride, after I have proved to him that he would be forcing my wife from me, that Valentine loves me, and will love no other, I will fight with him, give him every advantage, and I shall kill him, or he will kill me; if I am victorious, he will not marry Valentine, and if I die I am very sure Valentine will not marry him."

Noirtier watched, with indescribable pleasure, this noble and sincere countenance, on which every sentiment his tongue uttered was depicted, adding by the expression of his fine features all that coloring adds to a sound and faithful drawing.

Still, when Morrel had finished, he shut his eyes several times, which was his manner of saying "No."

"No?" said Morrel; "you disapprove of this second project as you did of the first?"

"I do," signified the old man.

"But what must then be done?" asked Morrel. "Madame de Saint-Méran's last request was that the marriage might not be delayed; must I let things take their course?" Noirtier did not move. "I understand," said Morrel; "I am to wait."

"Yes."

"But delay may ruin our plan, sir," replied the young men. "Alone, Valentine has no power; she will be compelled to submit. I am here almost miraculously, and can scarcely hope for so good an opportunity to occur again. Believe me, there are only the two plans I have proposed to you; forgive my vanity, and tell me which you prefer. Do you authorize Mademoiselle Valentine to intrust herself to my honor?"

"No."

"Do you prefer I should seek M. d'Epinay?"

"No."

"Whence, then, will come the help we need—from chance?" resumed Morrel.

"No."

"From you?"

"Yes."

"You thoroughly understand me, sir? Pardon my eagerness, for my life depends on your answer. Will our help come from you?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of it?"

"Yes." There was so much firmness in the look which gave this answer, no one could, at any rate, doubt his will, if they did his power.

"Oh, thank you a thousand times! But how, unless a miracle should restore your speech, your gesture, your movement, how can you, chained to that arm-chair, dumb and motionless, oppose this marriage?" A smile lit up the old man's face, a strange smile of the eyes on a paralyzed face.

"Then I must wait?" asked the young man.

"Yes."

"But the contract?" The same smile returned. "Will you assure me it shall not be signed?"

"Yes," said Noirtier.

"The contract shall not be signed!" cried Morrel. "Oh! pardon me, sir; I can scarcely realize so great a happiness. Will they not sign it?"

"No," said the paralytic. Notwithstanding that assurance, Morrel still hesitated. This promise of an impotent old man was so strange, that, instead of being the result of the power of his will, it might emanate from enfeebled organs. Is it not natural that the madman, ignorant of his madness, claims to realize things beyond his control? The weak man talks of burdens he can raise, the timid of giants he can confront, the poor of treasures he spends, the most humble peasant, in the height of his pride, calls himself Jupiter. Whether Noirtier understood the young man's indecision, or whether he had not full confidence in his docility, he looked steadily at him.

"What do you wish, sir?" asked Morrel; "that I should renew my promise of remaining tranquil?" Noirtier's eye remained fixed and firm, as if to imply that a promise did not suffice; then it passed from his face to his hands.

"Shall I swear to you?" asked Maximilian.

"Yes," said the paralytic, with the same solemnity. Morrel understood that the old man attached great importance to an oath. He extended his hand.

"I swear to you, on my honor," said he, "to await your decision respecting the course I am to pursue with M. d'Epinay."

"That is right," said the old man.

"Now," said Morrel, "do you wish me to retire?"

"Yes."

"Without seeing Mademoiselle Valentine?"

"Yes."

Morrel made a sign that he was ready to obey, "But," said he, "first allow me to embrace you as your daughter did just now." Noirtier's expression could not be misunderstood. The young man pressed his lips on the same spot, on the old man's forehead, where Valentine's had been. Then he bowed a second time and retired.

He found outside the door the old servant, to whom Valentine had given directions; he conducted Morrel along a dark passage, which led to a little door opening on the garden. Morrel soon found the spot where he had entered; with the assistance of the shrubs he gained the top of the wall, and by his ladder was, in an instant, in the clover-field, where his cab was still waiting for him. He got in it, and thoroughly wearied by so many emotions, he arrived about midnight in the Rue Meslay, threw himself on his bed, and slept soundly.

END OF VOLUME III.